

Applying for legal help just got easier New online application helps Legal Aid clients get answers sooner

Each year, tens of thousands of residents throughout central northeast Ohio apply for services through Community Legal Aid.

Thanks to technology upgrades, that process just got a whole lot easier.

Legal Aid, which provides its clients with free legal advice and representation, just announced a new online application system is ready for clients to use.

“It’s a day some of us thought may never come,” joked Executive Director Steven McGarrity. “But we’re so excited it’s here. We really think it’s going to be a game-changer for our clients.”

The new system boasts several upgrades, including being mobile friendly and letting clients know sooner in the process if their issue isn’t something Legal Aid can help with.

“We see tens of thousands of applications each year,” McGarrity explained. “We would love to help everyone, but unfortunately, it’s just not possible. But this lets us at least let people know earlier in the process if we can’t help them.”

McGarrity shared that the organization’s intention is to be more respectful of people’s time and help them find assistance elsewhere.

“One of the ways we’ve done that is by building in educational resources and community referrals directly into the system,” he said.

When someone completes an application, they’ll get a notice about next steps, as well as some information to read and learn about their particular legal situation, and a list of other community resources they can use.

“Our goal is to do the best we can do for any client who comes to us,” McGarrity continued. “Even if we don’t have an attorney to help with their particular issue, we want to be able to help them in some way. Helping them learn about their issue and what other resources are out there is at least a start.”

The project, funded by the Legal Services Corporation, was aimed at bringing legal aid application processes “into the 21st century,” McGarrity said.

“In this day and age, for us not to have a platform that can be used on a cell phone is just not useful,” he said. “We’re so thankful to be able to have this funding, which has allowed us to design a system truly meant to meet our clients where they are.”

To check out the new online application process, or to apply for services through Legal Aid, visit www.communitylegalaid.org/apply.

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