

Legal Aid Receives \$1.2 Million in Grants to Help Local Domestic Violence Victims

Community Legal Aid has been awarded more than \$1 million in grant funding to help local domestic violence victims.

Specifically, Legal Aid was awarded a shared grant of nearly \$635,000 for its Justice for Victimized Families project in Trumbull County. Legal Aid also received \$600,000 from the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to provide legal assistance to domestic violence victims in central northeast Ohio. Both grants span three years and aim to help domestic violence survivors stay safe and rebuild their lives.

"We do many things at Legal Aid," says Legal Aid Executive Director Steven McGarrity. "We save homes by preventing evictions and foreclosures. We save much needed benefits for the disabled and for veterans. We save income and assets for people facing crushing debt through bankruptcy.

"But there is only one thing we do that directly saves lives, and that is the work we do for survivors of violence."

McGarrity underscores the deadly effects of domestic violence.

"In Ohio, 91 deaths occurred during domestic violence situations last year," he says, pointing to statistics released by the Ohio Domestic Violence Network on domestic violence incidents from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018.

Justice for Families grant to help Trumbull County domestic violence victims

The Justice for Families grant was awarded to Legal Aid and partners Someplace Safe, Solace Center, and the Trumbull County Family Court led by Judge Pamela Rintala.

Collectively, through a pilot program, the grantees will provide Trumbull County domestic violence victims and families with more court-based support programs, additional civil legal assistance, advocacy in criminal domestic violence cases, increased access for safe visitation, and other specialized services.

Legal Aid attorney Jeanne Charles, who manages Legal Aid's family law team, says the grant will help fill gaps to give victims greater support.

"We're working together closely with our partners to address the special challenges facing families involved in domestic violence, to provide them important services to keep families safe," Charles says. "Trumbull County voiced a need for more help with domestic violence cases, and we are grateful to be able to answer that call through this grant."

Office on Violence Against Women grant geared to help domestic violence survivors rebuild their lives

Legal Aid will use the OVW grant to provide additional legal support to domestic violence victims in its eight-county service area: Columbiana, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Trumbull and Wayne. The funding will prospectively help CLAS lessen the recurrence of domestic violence and help victims get back on their feet.

"This grant will help us to empower our clients to break the cycle of domestic violence so they can obtain and maintain independence from their abuser and have a voice in court. Our presence in court often helps survivors feel empowered for the first time in their relationship," Charles says. "With our help, survivors are able to advocate for a fresh start ... safety measures for their children and themselves and financial stability for their future."

In addition, the OVW grant will support victims of dating violence. This year, a new Ohio law enables victims of dating violence to seek a civil protection order against an abusive partner.

Prior to the new law, dating violence victims who did not live with and/or have a child with their abuser could only receive a protection order if they were the victim of stalking or sexual abuse by a dating partner.

“There was a gap in the law, where folks who had been dating and never lived together or did not have a child together could not receive a court protection order,” says Charles, who adds that the OVW grant will support and protect these victims previously excluded from court-ordered protection.

Anyone interested in learning more about Legal Aid’s work with survivors of violence can visit www.communitylegalaid.org/lav or ask for more information from their local domestic violence shelter. Those interested in applying for any type of legal help can do so online at www.communitylegalaid.org/apply or by calling (800) 998-9454.

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