

# Legal Aid Receives \$1 Million-Plus 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 (CLAS) was awarded 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 (OIV) 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, 116 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, 2016 to June 30, 2017.

## **Justice to Victimized Families grant to help Trumbull County domestic violence victims**

The Justice for Victimized 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 supervised visitations and exchanges involving their children, court-based programs, more civil legal assistance, and other specialized services that are currently have deficiencies.

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 families involved in domestic violence face, to provide them legal intervention," Charles says. "Trumbull County voiced a need for us to help in more domestic violence cases, and we are grateful to be able to answer that call through this grant."

## **OIV grant geared to help domestic violence survivors rebuild their lives**

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

“It helps us and our clients break the cycle of domestic violence so they can obtain and maintain independence from their abuser and have a voice in court. Our presence helps them get their power back,” Charles says. “Without us they would not be able to advocate for themselves in the same way or be able to discover the \$20,000 their spouse was hiding from them.”

In addition, the OIV 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 OIV grant will support and protect these victims previously excluded from court-ordered protection.

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