



PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES
Equal Access to Justice

PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES, INC. 2017-2018 VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT PLAN¹

"If we are to keep our democracy, there must be one commandment: Thou shalt not ration justice."

-The Honorable Learned Hand

"I think the first duty of society is justice." – Alexander Hamilton

Prairie State Legal Services, Inc. is a non-profit law firm that provides free civil legal aid to low-income persons and seniors who have important legal problems affecting their basic human needs. Prairie State serves 36 counties in northern and central Illinois, outside of Cook County, from 12 regional offices and several special projects. We represent survivors of domestic violence in orders of protection, divorce and other family cases; people with disabilities who are wrongfully denied benefits; tenants who are being unlawfully evicted from their homes; families who are facing utility shut-offs or mortgage foreclosures; seniors who are facing improper discharge from nursing homes or are victims of elder abuse; and many others with urgent legal problems.

Prairie State is the only provider of free civil legal aid in most of the 36 counties we serve. The need for legal assistance far outstrips the capacity of Prairie State's 132 paid staff including attorneys, paralegals, intake specialists, *pro bono* coordinators, and support staff – many of whom are part-time employees – to provide advice and representation to eligible clients:

- Prairie State's 36 county service area is home to over 435,000 persons with incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level. Between 2000 and 2015, the percent of the Chicago region's poor who were living in the suburbs rose from 34% to 49%. The rate of poverty in Illinois is stuck where it was during the Great Recession. (Census data; [March 2017 Report on Illinois Poverty](#), Heartland Alliance)
- Nearly half of low-income households in Illinois experience one or more legal problems each year, but receive assistance for only one in six of those problems. [The Legal Aid Safety Net: A Report on the Legal Needs of Low-Income Illinoisans, February 2005.](#)
- In 2016, Prairie State opened almost 15,000 cases for services ranging from individualized legal advice over the phone to representation in court. During that same period, however, there were more than 29,000 calls to our centralized intake service. We use a triage system to sort these calls; we were unable to talk to many callers who had important legal problems which did not fall into the most urgent categories.

More information about Prairie State can be found at www.pslegal.org.

¹ As a recipient of federal funds from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), Prairie State must follow federal regulations promulgated by LSC in the operation of its program and services. These regulations require grantees to prepare an annual Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Plan (45 CFR Part 1614), to operate a PAI program, and to report to LSC annually regarding its PAI services. This document is Prairie State's PAI Plan for the year 2017-2018.

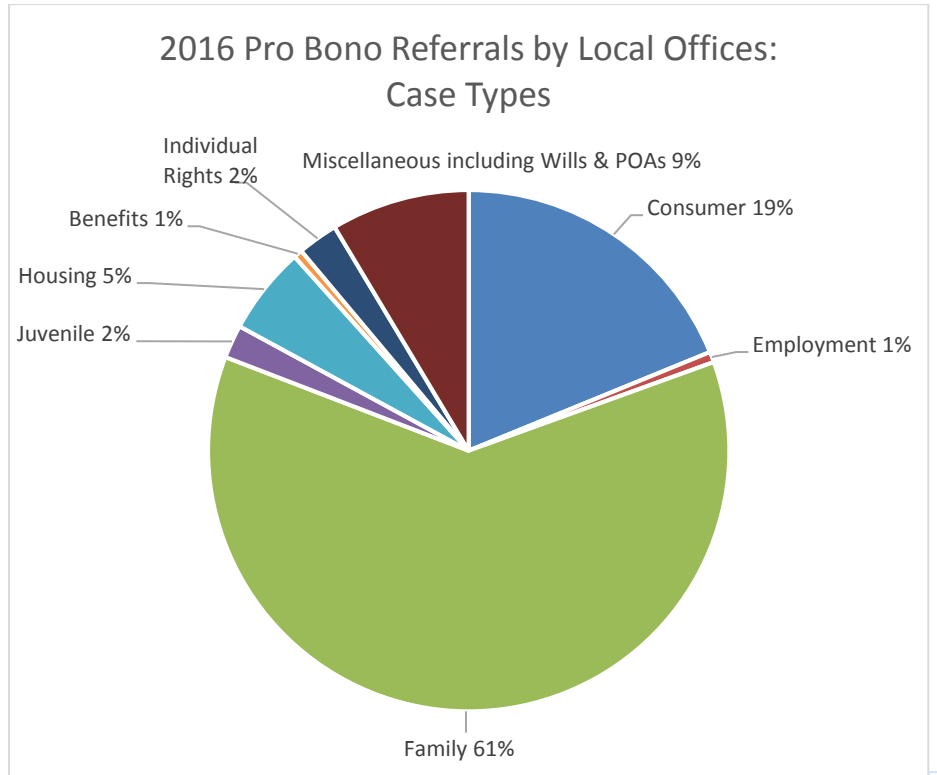
Prairie State's Volunteer Programs

The work of volunteer attorneys, paralegals, law students, undergraduates, intake specialists, support staff, and others across the Prairie State service area provides a critical supplement to the work of Prairie State's paid staff. In addition to enabling Prairie State to help more of northern and central Illinois' most vulnerable residents and making immeasurable improvements in the lives of those clients and their families, volunteers make a larger contribution to the public good. A number of recent studies have uncovered alarmingly low rates of confidence in our justice system. Volunteers support the justice system and the public's faith in that system by increasing the ability of the public to access the courts and helping ensure the fair administration of justice.

Prairie State administers 11 local *pro bono* projects out of its 12 regional offices. These local projects operate with strong support from the local bar and courts, and focus primarily on referring individual cases to local attorneys for extended representation, for example in court, in negotiations or before administrative agencies. Several of these local projects also include advice clinics or courthouse help desks. In addition, Prairie State operates two program-wide *pro bono* projects: a Social Security Reconsideration Project and a Telephone Counseling/Intake Hotline Project. Additionally, dozens of volunteers work in our offices each year in a variety of capacities. All work performed through Prairie State's *pro bono* projects is covered by Prairie State's malpractice insurance.

2016 Pro Bono Highlights

- Almost 400 volunteer attorneys in our local communities accepted 799 new *pro bono* case referrals from our local offices for advice or more extensive representation. Approximately 61% of these cases involved a family law matter.



- Volunteers reported securing court awards for family law clients referred to them by our local projects totaling over \$1,060,000.00 in annual child support or maintenance and in one-time property allocations. These awards will provide essential help to these clients to care for their families.
- Volunteers reported over 6800 hours of service to clients referred by our local *pro bono* projects, our Social Security Reconsideration Project, and our Borderless *Pro Bono* Project. This outstanding contribution of volunteer time demonstrates the strong commitment of our volunteers; in some cases these hours help us access grant funding because of the value of this time. We believe that some volunteers underreport their volunteer time, perhaps not realizing that this information is critical to us for our assessment of the effectiveness of our volunteer programs and that the data is considered by some funders of Prairie State.
- Twenty attorney volunteers with our Telephone Counseling intake hotline completed over 300 cases by providing individualized advice or other brief services to callers. They also spoke with many additional clients and referred their cases on to our local offices for more in-depth services on the most critical cases. Several volunteer intake specialists who are not attorneys contributed their services in taking phone applications, allowing our lawyers to spend their time providing legal advice.
- In total, volunteer attorneys in the community, working through our special projects and working as unpaid staff in our offices completed 1540 cases in 2016.
- More than 20 undergraduate, paralegal, and law students interned with Prairie State in 2016. These students interviewed clients, drafted court pleadings, conducted legal research, reviewed and summarized medical records in Social Security cases, and performed other activities in support of our work.
- Twenty retired, inactive, or out-of-state attorneys performed *pro bono* services through Prairie State under [Illinois Supreme Court Rule 756\(k\)](#). Prairie State's volunteers comprise more than 30% of the total number of Illinois attorneys who performed *pro bono* services under Rule 756(k) in 2016.
- Prairie State presented more than 20 live or web-based continuing legal education courses free of charge to volunteers and prospective volunteers, and continued its comprehensive family law eLearning course available through [Illinois Legal Aid Online](#).
- Prairie State continued its successful *pro bono* legal advice walk-in clinics in Bloomington in partnership with State Farm, the Eleventh Judicial Circuit *Pro Bono* Committee, the McLean County Bar Association, the Immigration Project, Mid Central Community Action, and the Public Interest Law Initiative (PILI). We held two clinics; 30 volunteer attorneys and 13 volunteer paralegals provided legal help to 41 Prairie State clients.
- Prairie State continued its partnership with the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois in Rockford, where eight volunteer attorneys provided free legal advice and brief services to more than 50 clients through a courthouse help desk.
- Prairie State began a new collaboration with the 17th Judicial Circuit Domestic Violence Coordinated Courts and the Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic/Northern Illinois University Law School to provide services to victims of domestic violence. The OP Court Project was initiated in May 2016 and was conceived by one of the judges, who saw a great unmet need for legal representation in plenary orders of

protection. Eighteen volunteer attorneys received extensive training in client-centered services and are participating in the project. Prairie State is responsible for matching the clients with volunteer attorneys. To date, Prairie State has referred 42 clients to volunteer attorneys.

- Prairie State's Borderless *Pro Bono* Project², which began serving clients in February 2015, continued its work throughout 2016. In 2016, 30 volunteers served 285 clients from at least 42 counties; these volunteers provided advice on family law matters to unmarried parents who reside or have a case pending in our service area.
- Twelve volunteer attorneys completed representation of 16 disabled clients in the application or reconsideration process at the Social Security Administration through our Reconsideration Project. Pro Bono Network, based in Oak Park, is a critical partner on this project.
- Prairie State continued to work with PILI (the Public Interest Law Initiative) and with members of the local bar and judiciary to promote *pro bono* participation through the Judicial Circuit *Pro Bono* Committees in the Tenth, Eleventh, and Fourteenth Judicial Circuits, and began work with the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit's Committee in 2017.
- Prairie State worked closely with bar associations throughout our 36 county service area to place cases with local attorneys, recognize volunteers, encourage *pro bono* involvement, and develop new volunteer opportunities.
- Prairie State enjoyed ongoing relationships with the corporate legal departments of Abbott Laboratories, AbbVie, Caterpillar Inc., Deere & Company, and State Farm.

We thank our volunteers and our *pro bono* partners for making these accomplishments possible.

2017 New Initiatives in Progress

- The Fourteenth Judicial Circuit *Pro Bono* Committee, which includes staff from PILI and Prairie State, volunteer attorneys, bar association members, corporate attorneys and a member of the Judiciary will sponsor a training on June 16, 2017 on the basics of pursuing an adult guardianship and of serving as a guardian ad litem. Following the training, Prairie State's Rock Island office will place volunteer cases with the newly trained volunteers.
- On April 29, 2017, Illinois State Representative Jehan Gordon-Booth, in partnership with Prairie State, Cabrini Green Legal Aid in Chicago, and Caterpillar, Inc., hosted the Peoria Second Chance Summit at the Life Together Center in Peoria. This event was preceded the week before by a CLE event to train volunteers to assist clients at the summit. Prairie State played an important role in recruiting the volunteer attorneys. On the day of the event 10 Prairie State lawyers and approximately 40 volunteers provided free legal services to over 200 individuals. The lawyers counseled clients on reviewing criminal history transcripts, prepared and filed petitions for expungement and sealing, and provided

² Prairie State's Borderless *Pro Bono* Project, which we conducted in 2015 and 2016, was funded through an LSC *Pro Bono* Innovations Fund (PBIF) grant. Prairie State was honored to be one of only 11 programs in the country to receive a PBIF grant in 2014. We have discontinued the project as the funding has ended and as we have determined that we should look for ways to provide these very important advice services with less investment of administrative and intake time on the part of our staff.

information on alternative forms of relief under Illinois law, such as health care waivers, certificates of good conduct, certificates of relief from disability, and clemency petitions. In addition to the clients who met individually with an attorney, many others obtained legal information from the Summit's resource fair. Prairie State continues to receive calls from potential clients and is working to place these clients with volunteers.

- Prairie State's Telephone Counseling Service intake hotline is beginning a partnership with the legal department at McDonald's Corporation. McDonald's attorneys will be advising clients who need legal advice with landlord-tenant problems including evictions, habitability issues, and security deposits.

2017 Volunteer Involvement Goals

With just over 14,000 attorneys registered in the Prairie State service area and hundreds of thousands of low-income residents in need of legal aid, we continue to explore ways to increase participation in our *pro bono* program and to efficiently integrate volunteers into our service delivery model. While each of our *pro bono* projects has its own specific goals and plans, the following are our goals for our volunteer program as a whole.

1. Continue to prioritize referral of individual clients to volunteer attorneys for extended representation.

The single greatest need of our clients – and one of the most cost effective uses of the limited resources Prairie State is able to devote to *pro bono* involvement – is for experienced attorneys who will provide direct and extended representation in court and in negotiations. This is particularly true in the area of family law. While thorough advice and brief services enable many of our clients to effectively represent themselves, many more of our clients lack the ability to successfully navigate the legal system without an attorney. We need more volunteer attorneys who are able to commit to providing in-court representation to Prairie State clients.

2. Increase referrals in the areas of family law, bankruptcy, wills/powers of attorney and expungement/sealing.

We have identified these as areas of significant client need which are particularly appropriate for volunteer involvement. These are cases which do not require a volunteer to “drop everything,” but in which the volunteer can make a very significant difference for a client. These extended representation cases are cost effective for our *pro bono* coordinators to refer. Expansion of our work in expungements and sealing may require us to offer MCLE events for potential volunteers and we are exploring where in our service area that training would be most effective.

3. Recruit more retired and inactive attorneys to volunteer in our offices.

Retired attorneys who volunteer in our offices and function as unpaid staff are one of our most valuable *pro bono* assets. While most of these attorneys do not have prior poverty law experience, their years of practice allow them to learn new areas of law quickly and they bring a fresh perspective to the issues legal aid attorneys see day in and day out. Because they no longer have an outside practice, many of these retired attorneys are able to devote time to contested or complex matters. Prairie State provides support, training, and supervision to these in-house volunteer attorneys. In our Ottawa office, a retired judge volunteers as our *pro bono* coordinator. This volunteer makes an outstanding contribution to his local community, taking advantage of his familiarity with both the law and the local bar to increase *pro bono* services to our clients.

We find that many attorneys are not aware that [Illinois Supreme Court Rule 756\(k\)](#) allows them to perform *pro bono* services through a sponsoring entity like Prairie State, even after they have changed their attorney registration status to inactive or retired. We will continue to publicize this option and to target retiring attorneys in our recruitment efforts.

Retired attorneys are not the only potential source of in-house volunteer lawyers. Many attorneys do not have paid positions because of family situations or obligations, but wish to remain active and contribute their special knowledge to their communities. These potential volunteers bring a wealth of value to our clients and our work. We will continue to seek these volunteers, and to provide them with the support they need to represent our clients and find a meaningful volunteer opportunity with us.

4. Develop and offer cost effective “bite-sized” *pro bono* opportunities.

The demand from busy attorneys for discrete, time-limited *pro bono* opportunities has grown enormously in recent years. Prairie State has responded to this demand by making more bite-sized *pro bono* opportunities available to volunteers. In 2010, only 37% of our *pro bono* cases were closed as advice or brief services; in 2016, 70% of our *pro bono* cases were closed as advice or brief services. Our Joliet and Bloomington advice clinics; our Rockford bankruptcy helpdesk; power of attorney clinics; self-represented litigant divorce clinics; and telephone counseling opportunities all provide discrete *pro bono* opportunities to volunteers.

However, while the need for civil legal aid services is almost limitless, it is challenging to create bite-sized *pro bono* opportunities that are meaningful to both volunteers and clients, and also cost effective for Prairie State. Many people who are unfamiliar with the operation of *pro bono* programs are surprised to learn that there is significant time involved in administering them properly. Attorneys volunteering their time expect that Prairie State will screen the cases for client financial eligibility and for at least apparent merit. The cases we refer through our *pro bono* projects remain Prairie State cases. This allows us to offer malpractice insurance to our volunteers and to report the cases to our funders. It also means, however, that we must comply with certain reporting and oversight requirements of our funders and our malpractice carrier. We must follow up to be sure that the cases are completed and that we have case closing data such as the information reflected in this Volunteer Involvement Plan. All of this takes time.

The Prairie State staff time required to refer an advice or brief services *pro bono* case to a volunteer is almost identical to the staff time required to refer a complex litigated matter; Prairie State staff frequently spend two to two and half times more hours screening, referring and following up on an advice or brief services *pro bono* matter than the volunteer attorney spends on the same matter. In some cases, the disproportion is even greater. As we analyze our “bite-sized” *pro bono* opportunities, it is increasingly clear that not all such opportunities make sense.

In 2017, we will continue to assess our current bite-sized *pro bono* offerings to maximize their cost effectiveness and efficiency. We also will continue to refine our data collection and client data base to maximize efficient data entry and effective extraction of meaningful reports. Before committing resources to new discrete *pro bono* ventures, we will evaluate these projects with a close eye toward cost effectiveness.

5. Use technology to train and support volunteers.

We believe that in-person continuing legal education is an effective way to train new volunteers and to thank existing volunteers for their service. However, technology affords new opportunities to efficiently and timely train and support volunteers.

In 2016 we created a substantial library of recorded training to allow for continuous onboarding of specialized *pro bono* project volunteers. We will continue to build that library in 2017. In 2015 we worked with Illinois Legal Aid Online to launch our Borderless *Pro Bono* Family Law Advice Project website. Although the Borderless *Pro Bono* Project has wound down, the interactive online CLE courses and other materials we developed continue to be available, and volunteer attorneys from across Illinois continue to access these materials. A challenge for the coming year will be reviewing and updating these materials as the Illinois legislature

continues to revise the governing statutes.

6. Recruit bilingual volunteer attorneys to represent limited English-proficient clients, and train English-speaking volunteer attorneys to use Prairie State’s interpreting and translation resources.

Many residents of our 36 counties have limited ability in English and are need of legal help for basic needs problems, but it has been a challenge to find volunteers to serve these clients. About five percent of the clients Prairie State served in 2016 were limited English-proficient, but only 1.7 percent of *pro bono* cases involved limited English-proficient clients. Self-representation is a particular challenge for individuals who are not proficient in English and thus finding volunteers who are willing to work with these clients is a priority. Prairie State has funds available for interpreting and translation services.

7. Involve more non-attorney volunteers.

We continue to explore and experiment with ways to involve non-attorney volunteers. Non-attorneys who are able to volunteer regularly in our Wheaton and Waukegan offices can help screen clients for eligibility for Prairie State’s services, which enables our intake attorneys to spend more time giving legal advice to eligible clients. Student interns and paralegal volunteers in our St. Charles office help investigate and work up cases for our Social Security reconsideration *pro bono* project.

Our law student internship program remains a critical piece of our non-attorney volunteer program. In 2017, almost every Prairie State office will host at least one law student intern and several will host two or more. Three of these students will have Illinois Supreme Court Rule 711 student practice licenses allowing them to provide advice as well as in-court representation to clients.

This coming year we will be seeking undergraduate interns and others who would be willing to make a part-time commitment for at least several months to work with our local office *pro bono* coordinators. We believe that this arrangement will be “win-win,” as the interns become familiar with the legal system and our cost in staff time per case drops, allowing us to serve even more clients.

We need your input!

Prairie State needs input to make our *pro bono* program as effective as possible. Our most successful *pro bono* efforts have grown out of conversations with our partners.

We actively invite bar leaders and other *pro bono* partners to offer input on this plan by contacting Prairie State’s Executive Director or Director of Advocacy Training and Volunteer Services:

Michael O’Connor
Executive Director
303 North Main Street, #600
Rockford, IL 61101
(815) 965-2134
moconnor@pslegal.org

Linda Rothnagel
Director of Advocacy Training and Volunteer
Services
5320 West Elm
McHenry, IL 60050
(815) 900-3286
lrothnagel@pslegal.org

You may also contact the staff of our regional offices and special projects:

Bloomington – (309) 827-5021

(serving Livingston, McLean, and Woodford Counties)

- Managing Attorney Adrian Barr (abarr@pslegal.org)

- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Kathy Boyle (kboyle@pslegal.org)

Joliet – (815) 727-5123

(serving Grundy and Will Counties)

- Managing Attorney Andrea DeTellis (adetellis@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Suzanne Helwich (shelwich@pslegal.org)

Kankakee – (815) 935-2750

(serving Iroquois and Kankakee Counties)

- Managing Attorney Ketura Baptiste (kbaptiste@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Nancy Hinton (nhinton@pslegal.org)

McHenry – (815) 344-9113

(serving McHenry County)

- Supervising Attorney Paul Zukowski (pzukowski@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Dori Michaels (dmichaels@pslegal.org)

Ottawa – (815) 434-5903

(serving Bureau, LaSalle, and Putnam Counties)

- Managing Attorney Don Dirks (ddirks@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Ret. Judge James Brusatte (jbrusatte@pslegal.org)

Peoria and Galesburg – (309) 674-9831

(serving Fulton, Henderson, Knox, Marshall, McDonough, Peoria, Stark, Tazewell and Warren Counties)

- Managing Attorney Denise Conklin (dconklin@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Kate Durham Whetstone (kwhetstone@pslegal.org)

Rockford – (815) 965-2902

(serving Boone, Carroll, Jo Daviess, Ogle, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties)

- Managing Attorney Kimberly Thielbar (kthielbar@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Wendy Crouch (wcrouch@pslegal.org)

Rock Island – (309) 794-1328

(serving Henry, Lee, Mercer, Rock Island, and Whiteside Counties)

- Managing Attorney Gretchen Farwell (gfarrowell@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Cherie Myers (cmyers@pslegal.org)

St. Charles – (630) 232-9415

(serving DeKalb, Kane, and Kendall Counties)

- Managing Attorney Kathryn McGowan Bettcher (kbettcher@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Marcy Heston (mheston@pslegal.org)

Waukegan – (847) 662-6925

(serving Lake County)

- Managing Attorney Samuel DiGrino (sdigrino@pslegal.org)
- *Pro Bono* Coordinator Susan Perlman (sperlman@pslegal.org)

Wheaton – (630) 690-2130

(serving DuPage County)

- Managing Attorney Marisa Wiesman (mwiesman@pslegal.org)

Low Income Tax Clinic – (630) 580-3315

(serving all 36 PRAIRIE STATE counties)

- Project Director Andrew VanSingel (avansingel@pslegal.org)
- Staff Attorney, Molly Recar (mrecar@pslegal.org)

Legal Help for Homeowners Project – (224) 321-5640

(serving all 36 PRAIRIE STATE counties)

- Project Director Jesse Hodierne (jhodierne@pslegal.org)

Fair Housing Project – (815) 965-2902

(serving Peoria, Tazewell, Winnebago, Boone, Lake, and McHenry Counties)

- Project Manager AJ Young (ajyoung@pslegal.org)

Social Security Reconsideration Pro Bono Project – (630) 232-9415

- Project Coordinator Anne Bardo (abardo@pslegal.org)

Telephone Counseling Pro Bono Project – (630) 690-2130

- Project Coordinator Cindy Matre (cmatre@pslegal.org)