Prairie State hires new Director of Pro Bono Services

Prairie State Legal Services is thrilled to announce Kimberly Thielbar as its new Director of Pro Bono Services. This is a newly created position at Prairie State as the result of a $331,148 Pro Bono Innovation Fund grant from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). This position is intended to help evaluate, organize and expand Prairie State’s overall pro bono program and to connect more volunteers with clients in need of critical civil legal services.

“I’m excited to be able to create something new, to develop a new project, and to continue to expand our current capabilities to help clients,” Thielbar says. She has worked at Prairie State since February 2013, first as a Staff Attorney in our Rockford office, then as Managing Attorney of our Rockford office since April 2015, and now in her new role as of November 1.

In 2018, Prairie State was among the top 15 (out of 133) LSC grantees nationwide in terms of the number of cases closed by volunteer attorneys. “We are very proud of what we have accomplished, but we believe we can build upon this success,” says Executive Director Michael O’Connor. “There are many more residents who have important civil legal needs and we only tap into a small portion of the practicing attorneys in our service area. The unmet need is particularly acute in the counties surrounding Cook County and in rural counties.”

Thielbar will begin by reviewing the existing pro bono program. She will look at what has worked in some offices and not in others as well as what has motivated pro bono attorneys to want to volunteer and keep returning. She says the pro bono program is important to Prairie State and to the volunteers who can make a difference beyond their day-to-day jobs.

“For Prairie State, it’s important because client need is always greater than our in-house capacity so having pro bono volunteers allows us to expand and help even more people,” Thielbar says.
Each day, our staff attorneys serve people across northern and central Illinois. They work with clients in need of adequate housing, critical health care, and protection from abuse.

Approximately 690,000 people live in poverty in the 36 Illinois counties we serve. It’s a daunting task for our small, yet capable team of staff and managing attorneys, paralegals, and support staff, but we are not alone in carrying out our mission.

We are grateful for our many volunteer attorneys who help Prairie State Legal Services by accepting cases that would go unaddressed because of our staff attorneys’ workload. As we recently celebrated the 2019 National Celebration of Pro Bono from October 20 to 26, this issue of Equal Access is dedicated to hundreds of private attorneys who selflessly give their time to help our clients.

You will hear from four retired attorneys—one who served as a circuit court judge and another who served as an assistant state’s attorney—who are spending their golden years helping our clients obtain critical services. You also will learn about our new Director of Pro Bono Services—a new position created to expand our pro bono efforts that will enable us to serve even more clients.

If you are one of our volunteers, we thank you for your service! While the names on pages 4-5 show an incredible number of people dedicated to helping people in need, we need more! Email volunteer@pslegal.org to learn how you can get involved.

Visit www.pslegal.org/offices for more information.
Upon retiring in 2012, LaSalle County Circuit Court Judge James L. Brusatte had two options: (1) Enjoy a quiet life beyond the bench, or (2) renew his law license and practice.

“I didn’t want to get calls at 3:30 in the morning. I didn’t want to have clients that I was beholden to,” says Brusatte. “But I felt I still wanted to be involved in the legal system and helping people.” He decided to volunteer as the pro bono coordinator in Prairie State’s Ottawa office, and he continues to enjoy the position today.

“It’s 75% enjoyment and 25% work,” Brusatte says. “I like the people. It keeps me busy. It makes me feel relevant.”

Brusatte is not alone, as other seasoned legal veterans are finding a new purpose in retirement by volunteering for Prairie State. Ann Conroy, a former assistant Lake County State’s Attorney, volunteers in Prairie State’s Waukegan office, and she says volunteering is less stressful than being in private practice as she is free to accept cases she is able to handle and reject ones she cannot.

“Whereas in [private] practice sometimes you really have to dig to find the things that are important that you have not been told,” she finds that “people who come [to Prairie State] have no motivation not to tell you everything.”

David Black, a retired attorney volunteering in Prairie State’s Rockford office, only takes cases that require sealing and expungement of criminal records. He finds the work incredibly fulfilling. In 2018 and 2019, Mr. Black has worked with over 315 clients needing assistance, and in at least 110 cases, the court has granted an expungement or sealing.

“All the clients that I have served have done something in their past that they are not proud of and they are seeking a second chance in life,” Black says. “They are wanting to better themselves, they want to be able to get better employment or better housing and this seems to be the best mechanism to do that and they are very appreciative of getting this second chance.”

Thad Gruchot, a retired corporate attorney, volunteers in Prairie State’s Waukegan office. He says, “A few years ago I was at my 50th anniversary as a member of the Chicago Bar Association, and we had to write a brief statement about one’s self and I wrote something like, ‘After 50 years of chasing the almighty dollar, I’m having more satisfaction at Prairie State without getting paid a penny.'”
Recognizing Our Volunteers

Bloomingtown
David Armstrong
James Bass
Michael Blaize
George Boyle
Gene Brucker
Natalie Bronson-Wheeler
Brendan Bukalski
Tristan Bullington
Hon. David Butler (Ret.)
Matthew Butler
Margaret Butzen
Nichole Byers
Sally Chalian
Gina Couri-Cyphers
Clay Cox
Jeffrey Crable
Julia Davis
Brian Day
Joseph Dehn
Russell DePew
Terry Dodds
Michael Dorsey
Tim Eckhardt
Randall Ehlers
Hannah Esiber
Dean Essig
Michael Fenger
J. Harrison Fulk
Aaron Galloway
Ryan Gammelgard
Jaimie Ganschow
William Gerber
Becky Gibson
Kristin Givens
Darren Grafe
Nick Grojean
Carrie Haas
Daniel Harrod
Samuel Harrod III
Nathan Hinch
Frank Hoffman
Nicholas Houska
Hon. John Huschen (Ret.)
Douglas B. Johnson
Jessica Jones
Jenna Kears
Stuart Kenney
Nargis Khokhar
G. Timothy Leighton
Emily Lewis-Gerig
Jeffrey Lindsay
William Mahrt
Matthew Majernik
Wendy Maulson
Donald John McClarey
Donald R. McClarey
Thomas McClure
Kathleen McDonald
Kraft
Michael McElvain
Melissa McGrath
Edward McRibbon
Stephen McManus
Justi Miller

Kankakee
Todd Miller
Keisha-Lu Mitra
David Moore
Fred Moore
Michelle Mosby-Scott
John Muir
Alan Novick
Helen Ogar
Carolyn Pitts
Robert W. Porter
Craig Queen
Jennifer Redd
Hon. Charles Reynard (Ret.)
Denise Risinger
Chris Schmidt
Stacy Seaman
Brian Shoemaker
Angela Skinner
Alice Smalley
Tessa Somers
Alan Tatnum
Sharon Ware
Stephanie Wong
Jessica Woods
Sarah Woollen
Bruce Zywiec

Joliet
Anthony Andreano
Frank Andreano
Robert Baran
Ashley Bechtold
Paul Boetto
Paul Braun
Joel Brown
Judith DeVriendt
Lea Drell
Angela Fillenwarth
Eric Frobish
Robert Geiger
Michael Gorcowski
Joan Harrop
Angela Henderson
David June
Victoria Kelly
Leanne Lantz
Rita Maldonado
Katherine Maloney
Kurt Meyer
Amber Mikula
Elizabeth Miller
Randal Miller
Rolonda Mitchell
Danielle Muckle
Gary Mueller
Jeannine Parker-Ross
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Kathleen Rock
Hilary Setton
George Sturh
Mary Szudarek
Katie VanDeusen
C. David Ward
Alonzo Zahour

Kankakee
Louise Bigott
Christopher Bohlen
Mary Elise Burnett
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Claire Chaplinski
George Cuonzo
Kimberley Donald
Nicholas Elliott
Karren Farmer
Edward Glazar
Kay Johnson
Dana Meyer
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Lindsay Parkhurst
Kirsten Steeves
Samantha Sweeney

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Jean Butler
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Martin Coonen
Brie Crawford
Mark Cummings
Linda Cunabahg
Edward Donahue
Jay Filler
David Fish
Michael Fleck
Desiree Frederik
Natalie Fredrickson-Gardner
Christine Gale
David Gervais
Lillian Gonzalez
Ninnette Gregory Karg
Maurice Grimes
Victor Gryniwicz
Catherine Herrmann
Carol Hill
James Hoffmann
William Holman
Jeffrey Inches
Richard Jackson
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Paul Krieg
Heather Kroencke
Denise Kuzniewski
Karen Lavin
Patti Marino
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Michael Meyer
Peter Michting
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Laura Myers
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William Petsche
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Frances Pitts
Paula Rieghns
Jonathan Rosemeyer

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Kathryn Baker
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Nick Balestrij
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Duane Berland
Roger Bolin
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James Brusatte
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Timothy Creedon
Jacob Frost
Timothy Gatta
Gary Gearhart
Ninnette Gregory Karg
Michael Gulo
Ryan Hamer
Holly Harris
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William Hintz
James Hoffman
William Hotopp
Heather Johnson
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William Keene
Cote Klinefelter
Jennifer Koenig-Lee

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Tomiko Ballard
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Brent Blair
Meghan Bolte
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Theresa Campbell
David Carter
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Katie Doerries
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Pamela Wilcox
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Ashley Worby
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William Beckman
A. Lou Benassi
Trisha Blake-Miller
Logan Block
Wade Blumenshine
Kirk Bode
Jennifer Bonestelle
Sumner Bourne
Adam Bowton
Michael Brandt
Anne Burton
Kathleen Carter
Andrew Cassidy
John Cassidy
Debra Cheng
Mary Corrigan
Chris Crawford
Laura Cullinan
Floyd Dailey
Spencer Daniels
Susan Dawson-Tibbits
Leslie Day
Justin Dillon
Don Driscoll
Kenneth Eathington
Tyler Eathington
Michelle Eggett
Wes Enz
Dustin Essig
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Mitch Gillfll
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James Kelly
Casey Kepple
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Jeff Krumpe
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William Loefell
Chad Long
Brian Lutz
Ambrose McCall
Chris McCall
Kateah McMaster
Noah Menold
Anne Mengen
Leann Meyer
Nicole Meyer
Louis Milot
Blake Mishler

Valerie Moehle
Cathy Molchin
Kathleen Monge
G. Edward Murphy
Jeff Neigel
Christopher Nelson
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William Wombacher
Ashley Worby
Kyle Worby
Prairie State thanks our attorneys who freely contributed their time in 2018 and 2019 to help our clients in need of justice.
Sometimes Prairie State’s fight for equal access to justice takes attorneys beyond the trial court level and up to the Illinois Appellate Court—either appealing an unfavorable ruling or fighting an appeal by the opposing party. Either way, Prairie State takes the appeals process very seriously, as it has the potential to create good (or bad) policy for more than just Prairie State clients, says Co-Director of Litigation Sarah Megan.

So far in 2019, the Illinois Appellate Court has favorably decided five of Prairie State Legal Services’ cases. Here is a synopsis of a few:

Managing Attorney Paul Zukowski successfully handled two appeals. In his first appeal, he represented a client who successfully won a plenary restraining order protecting our client and the client’s child during visits with his father. However, the father appealed on the basis that our client testified to events that were not mentioned in the petition, claiming the trial judge improperly based the decision on evidence that went “beyond the four corners of the petition for order of protection.”

In the appeal, Zukowski argued that the father had sufficient notice of the allegations of his abuse and that he waived any argument about it because he failed to object to any of the evidence during the hearing. Additionally, Zukowski argued that the judge had a duty to hear the evidence of abuse of the child under the Domestic Violence Act. The Appellate Court affirmed the order of protection.

Staff Attorney Jamie Mosser represented a client defending an order of protection on appeal. Her client, who was unrepresented at trial, sought the order against her ex-husband for harassment on a web application that both parties used to communicate about their child and arrange visits. The trial court granted the order of protection, finding that the conduct caused our client emotional distress and would cause a reasonable person distress under these circumstances.

On appeal, the ex-husband argued that this conduct was minimal and did not cause our client distress. He cited a problematic case that said not every dispute between parties rises to the level of harassment under the Domestic Violence Act. Mosser argued that the trial judge carefully found every element of harassment and gave well-supported reasons for his decision supported by the record. The Appellate Court agreed with her and the affirmed the trial court’s decision.

Staff Attorneys Kira Devin and Emily Hardy helped a client retain her Section 8 voucher after a housing authority terminated it for failing to complete the annual eligibility certification. The client came to Prairie State after that decision and although Devin and Hardy filed for cert and successfully obtained a stay of enforcement, the trial court affirmed the termination. Devin and Hardy later appealed to the Second District and won. The housing authority reissued the client’s voucher.
In Spring 2020, Prairie State’s Wheaton and St. Charles offices will combine their services into a single, larger office at 31W007 North Avenue in West Chicago. The new office is located between the existing locations.

The St. Charles office serves residents of DeKalb, Kane and Kendall Counties. The Wheaton office serves DuPage County residents. In addition, the Wheaton office houses some staff that serve Prairie State’s entire 36-county service area, such as telephone counseling staff, Legal Help for Homeowners staff, and the Low Income Tax Clinic.

“Joining the two offices creates opportunities to improve and expand our services,” says Prairie State Executive Director Michael O’Connor. “Bringing more attorneys together under one roof allows for greater collaboration and cooperation, and ensures that we can offer clients quality assistance in a wide range of issues. This is of growing importance because our funding increasingly requires that each attorney must specialize in a certain area of law.”

Prairie State will continue to make itself accessible to the clients and communities it serves by conducting outreach and intake at shelters and community centers and by doing home visits.

**Ways to Give**

**Give Online**
Visit www.pslegal.org/donate to make a donation of your choice to help those in need of critical civil legal aid.

**Make it monthly!** To make a monthly recurring gift, click “Make this a monthly gift.” All 2019 recurring gifts will be matched by a generous donor up to $10,000!

**Give While You Shop**
Make your holiday purchases count by shopping AmazonSmile!

Shop through www.smile.amazon.com and designate “Prairie State Legal Services, Inc.” as your organization and Prairie State will receive a portion of your purchase. It’s easy and effective!

**Give Through Your IRA**
If you are 70½ years old or older, you can take advantage of a simple way to benefit Prairie State and potentially receive tax benefits in return.

You can give through your IRA directly to a qualified charity such as Prairie State Legal Services. This popular gift option is commonly called the IRA charitable rollover, but you may also see it referred to as a qualified charitable distribution, or QCD for short.

**Why Consider This Gift?**
- Your gift will be put to use today, allowing you to see the difference your donation is making.
- You may experience tax benefits from this type of gift.
- If you have not yet taken your required minimum distribution for the year, your IRA charitable rollover gift can satisfy all or part of that requirement.

Contact your financial advisor to get started.

Whether you are an attorney seeking to do pro bono work or a community member who wishes to make a difference in the lives of others, Prairie State Legal Services can use your help!

Learn how to get involved by visiting www.pslegal.org/volunteer or email volunteer@pslegal.org to learn more today!
#GivingTuesday is a global day of giving fueled by the power of social media and collaboration. #GivingTuesday kicks off the charitable season and end-of-year giving.

Last year, Prairie State raised over $35,000 during its #GivingTuesday campaign.

OUR 2019 GOAL IS TO RAISE $50,000!

Join Us On Facebook!
Join us on Facebook on December 3, create your own fundraiser, and tell others about why you support Prairie State Legal Services!

We Need Your Help!
Share your “Giving Story” about why you support Prairie State Legal Services for a chance to win up to $10,000 for Prairie State Legal Services. Visit https://mygivingstory#givingtuesday.org/

Double (or triple!) your money!
The Retirement Research Foundation (RRF) will match the first $5,000 raised by December 10th for our work with older adults! RRF will also give $1,500 to the organization that brings in the most new donors...help us win!
Pledge a monthly gift and Board Member Lenny Sachs of Howard & Howard in Peoria will double your money!
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