



Complaint Procedure for Clients and Applicants

Commitment to Clients and Community

PSLS is committed to providing high quality legal services to clients, and to being accountable to the communities Prairie State serves and those individuals applying for PSLS services. PSLS intends that the procedures explained herein provide a fair method for the resolution of disputes.

A. Complaints by Applicants Regarding the Denial of Legal Assistance

Prairie State does not receive sufficient funding to assist all of the people who contact us seeking help. Therefore, PSLS focuses its resources on those cases which involve threats to clients' basic needs, such as food, safety and shelter. In addition, there are many types of cases that Prairie State is not allowed to handle due to government restrictions, such as criminal or fee-generating cases. If Prairie State denies legal services to any applicant, or offers less assistance than the applicant is seeking from Prairie State, the applicant may initiate a complaint process that involves the following steps:

1. Contact With Managing Attorney or Other Supervisor. The applicant may contact the Managing Attorney of the PSLS office serving the area where the applicant resides, and make a complaint. Alternatively, the applicant may contact a PSLS attorney who directly supervises the work of the staff member who is the subject of the complaint. Such contact shall be within a reasonable time of the action denying or limiting representation and the complaint may or may not be in writing. The Managing Attorney or other supervisor shall investigate and respond to the complaint within a reasonable time, normally within 10 working days.
2. Complaint to Executive Director. If the applicant is not satisfied with the Managing Attorney's or other supervisor's response, the applicant may make a complaint in writing within 10 working days of that response by writing to the PSLS Executive Director. The applicant should provide a phone number or other information about how to be contacted to discuss the complaint. Upon request, staff of the local PSLS office shall provide assistance in preparing a written complaint to any applicant who needs such assistance.
3. Opportunity for Discussion. Within 10 working days after receiving the written complaint, the Executive Director or his/her designee shall attempt to contact the applicant to discuss the matter. If the applicant so requests, a member of the Prairie State Board of Directors will also participate in this discussion, unless doing so is not practical due the unavailability of a board member.

4. Executive Director Decision. Within 10 working days after discussing the complaint with the applicant, the Executive Director shall make a decision and inform the applicant in writing. If the Executive Director, despite reasonable efforts, is unable to contact the applicant to discuss the complaint, he/she shall make a decision based on the information contained in the complaint as well as information from the local office and shall inform the applicant of this decision in writing within 20 working days of receiving the written complaint.

B. Complaints by Clients about the Manner or Quality of Legal Assistance

If any Prairie State client is dissatisfied with the manner or quality of legal assistance provided by PSLs or rendered by a private attorney pursuant to Prairie State's private attorney involvement program, the client may initiate a complaint process that involves the following steps:

1. Contact with Managing Attorney or Other Supervisor. The client may contact the Managing Attorney of the PSLs office serving the area where the client resides and make a complaint. Alternatively, the client may contact a PSLs attorney who directly supervises the work of the staff member who is the subject of the complaint. Such contact shall be within a reasonable time of the action or inaction that constitutes the basis for the complaint. The complaint need not be in writing. The Managing Attorney or other supervisor shall investigate and respond to the complaint within a reasonable time, normally within 10 working days.

2. Complaint to Executive Director. If the client is not satisfied with the Managing Attorney's or other supervisor's response, the client may make a complaint in writing within 10 working days of that response by writing to the PSLs Executive Director. The client should provide a phone number or other information about how to be contacted to discuss the complaint. Upon request, staff of the local PSLs office shall provide assistance to any client who needs such assistance in preparing a written complaint.

3. Opportunity for Discussion and Executive Director Decision. Within 10 working days after receiving the written complaint, the Executive Director or his/her designee shall attempt to contact the client to discuss the matter. Within 10 working days after discussing the complaint with the client, the Executive Director shall make a decision and inform the client in writing. If the Executive Director, despite reasonable efforts, is unable to contact the client to discuss the complaint, he/she shall make a decision based on the information contained in the complaint as well as information from the local office and shall inform the client of this decision in writing within 20 working days of receiving the written complaint.

4. Grievance Committee of Board

If the client does not agree with the Executive Director's decision, the client may appeal to the Grievance Committee of the PSLs Board of Directors, by notifying the Executive Director within 10 working days after the date of his/her decision. Clients have the following rights in presenting appeals to the Grievance Committee:

a. Right to an Informal Hearing. The client shall have an opportunity to present the client's information at an informal hearing. The hearing will normally be held by telephone, but if so requested by the client, the hearing may be held by videoconference, in-person, or by some other reasonable alternative. If the hearing is held by telephone, reasonable arrangements will be made for the client to participate at no cost for the telephone call. The client may be accompanied by another person who can speak on the client's behalf. The hearing will ordinarily last no longer than one hour, unless the committee finds that there is good cause to provide a longer hearing. The Executive Director or his/her designee shall be present at the hearing, in order to answer questions or provide information requested by the committee.

b. Written Statement and Evidence. The client may submit a written statement to the Grievance Committee. Upon request, staff of the local PSLs office shall provide assistance to any client who needs such assistance in preparing the written statement. The client may submit other written evidence or documents believed to be relevant to the appeal.

c. Decision of the Grievance Committee. The Grievance Committee shall issue a final written decision within 30 working days after the conclusion of the hearing.

C. Reasonable Accommodations in the Complaint Process.

If any applicant or client requires assistance in pursuing any grievance rights as set forth herein due to a disability, upon request, PSLs will arrange reasonable accommodations to assist in the filing and presentation of the complaint. Such persons should advise the Managing Attorney or the Executive Director of any special assistance needed.
