

The Westmoreland Bar Foundation (WBF) has recently expanded the current Pro Bono Program of Westmoreland County. With additional IOLTA funding, the pro bono staff will take a monthly road trip to New Kensington to provide services to citizens in the northern end of Westmoreland County. The mobile program will set up offices in New Kensington's City Hall; citizens with scheduled appointments can meet first with the pro bono staff for screening and intake purposes before meeting with a volunteer lawyer.

WBF Treasurer Milt Munk, who authored the grant proposal, spoke of the need for a remote office: "Westmoreland County is one of the largest counties in area in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The cities of New Kensington, Arnold and Monessen are all located more than 35 miles from the Greensburg Pro Bono office and there is no convenient public transportation available to enable potential clients to come to Greensburg."

By taking the program to the northern part of the county, the WBF expects to be able to service those clients who find it difficult to travel to Greensburg. More importantly, the program is for those who do not have the means to make the trips for the initial consultation and follow-up lawyer meetings.

The program's ultimate success, however, will be determined by lawyer involvement.

"The Pro Bono Program works in Westmoreland County because of the volunteer efforts of our attorneys," stated WBF Executive Director Diane Krivoniak. "The New Kensington attorneys are a close-knit group, who are active in and supportive of their community. This program can benefit the attorneys by making it convenient and more efficient for bar members to satisfy their pro bono hours."

The Pro Bono Program provides service to those who are income eligible and fall within the "125 percent above poverty" guideline. For example, a family of four would need to earn less than \$2,000 per month or \$23,000 per year to qualify for pro bono services.

"When we say we are helping the poor, we truly are helping those with very limited resources," Pro Bono Coordinator Iva Munk said. "The kinds of clients that this program represents are those who could not afford to hire a private attorney."

The Pro Bono Program began in Westmoreland County in 1991 with the hiring of Iva Munk and funding provided by both Laurel Legal Services and IOLTA. What started with a single room office and one employee has grown to a 1,200 square foot office with three employees and five contract attorneys. Cases handled through pro bono include: landlord/tenant, custody, bankruptcy, license suspension, unemployment and social security.

The New Kensington Program is expected to begin sometime in early 2005. By the end of 2005, the goal is to have a landlord/tenant mediation program and a domestic relations clinic added to pro bono programming.