



***A Report on Pennsylvania's
Access to Justice Act,
FY 2004-2011***

*Report Prepared for
Pennsylvania IOLTA Board,
An organization of the Supreme Court
of Pennsylvania
May 2012*

Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyers Trust Account Board



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Contact Information The Pennsylvania IOLTA Board
P.O. Box 62445 • Harrisburg, PA 17106-2445
Telephone 717-238-2001 • 888-PA-IOLTA (724-6582)
FAX 717-238-2003
Email: paiolta@pacourts.us

About This Report This report, related to funding received as a result of the Access to Justice Act (42 Pa. C. S. Section 4901 et. seq.), was sponsored by the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board (PA IOLTA), with data provided by the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. (PLAN, Inc.). The report was produced for PA IOLTA by The Resource for Great Programs, Inc.

Data appendices to this report, and endnotes that provide additional information about data calculations used throughout the report, are available on the PA IOLTA web site www.paiolta.org/grants/grants_reportsindex.htm.



Introduction: Overview of the Access to Justice Act

In July 2002, Pennsylvania's Access to Justice Act (AJA) was approved with strong, bipartisan legislative support and signed into law by then-Governor Mark Schweiker. The statute established a \$2 surcharge on filings in state courts, with the resulting revenue designated to provide free civil legal assistance to low-income Pennsylvanians.

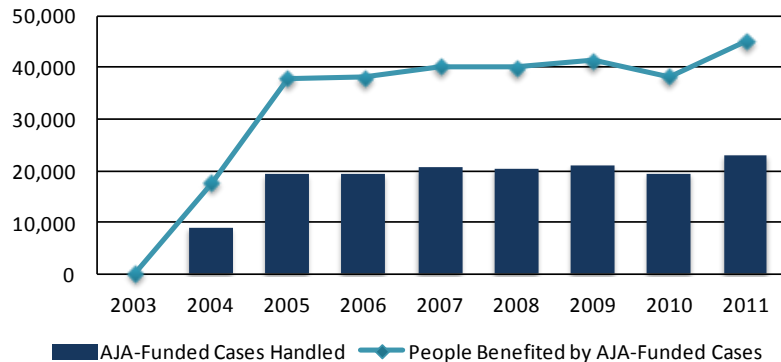
In 2006, AJA was extended for a second five-year period. The AJA statute is now scheduled to sunset on November 1, 2012, requiring action by the legislature to retain this vital source of support.

In addition, effective December 2009, under the leadership of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, a \$1 supplemental filing fee was enacted for the AJA to help offset a significant decline in state IOLTA funding. Unlike the original \$2 filing fee surcharge, however, the supplemental fee was not applied to traffic citations.

A legislative performance audit of AJA in May 2011 lauded the results achieved by Legal Aid providers with the funds and recommended that the General Assembly "consider making

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Cases Handled and People Benefitted by AJA-Funded Programs, FY 2004-2011



Each year's "Cases Handled" figure includes all cases completed in that fiscal year, and all cases that were still active at the end of that fiscal year. The cumulative total over the eight years of AJA funding was 117,632 cases, the sum of cases completed during the eight years, and the active cases carried into FY 2012. The cumulative total of people directly benefitted was 231,735.



Civil Legal Aid in Pennsylvania is a Partnership

- » **Pennsylvania IOLTA (PA IOLTA)** — PA IOLTA, or the Lawyers Trust Account Board, is an entity created by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania to help provide equal access to civil legal representation for low-income Pennsylvanians. PA IOLTA distributes grants from an array of funding sources including the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program, the Access to Justice Act filing-fee surcharge and supplemental fee, the Magisterial District Judges Interest on Trust Accounts Program, and more.
- » **Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. (PLAN, Inc.)** — PLAN, Inc. administers state-appropriated funds and PA IOLTA grants, and provides strategic leadership and coordination for eight, independent regional Legal Aid programs and six specialized legal resource programs that, together with one non-PLAN-funded program, comprise the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (see back cover). PLAN, Inc.'s principal funding sources include PA IOLTA, the federal Legal Services Corporation, and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. PLAN-funded programs also receive financial support from an array of other federal, state, and local government entities, and private sources.

Introduction: Overview of the AJA *(continued)*

AJA by the Numbers

Here is a summary of the history and impact of Access to Justice Act's \$2 court filing fee surcharge and \$1 supplemental filing fee:

» Chronology:

- 2002: \$2 AJA filing fee began
- 2004: AJA grants initiated
- 2006: AJA renewed
- 2009: \$1 supplemental fee enacted for AJA
- 2011 (July): AJA's \$1 supplemental fee extended
- 2012 (November): AJA's \$2 filing fee expires
- 2014 (December): AJA's \$1 supplemental fee expires

» AJA Funds awarded:

- \$11 million (FY '11)
- 22% of all PA Legal Aid funding (FY '11)
- \$67 million (FY '04-'11)

» People and Legal Cases:

- 117,632 cases handled (FY '04-'11)
- 231,735 people directly benefitted (FY '04-'11)

» Economic Impact (FY '04-'11):

- \$66 million in cost savings to taxpayers and communities
- \$162 million in direct federal benefit payments to residents
- \$302 million economic multiplier effect on local and state economies
- \$530 million in *total* income and savings for residents and communities
- 2,245 jobs for Pennsylvania workers

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the AJA fee and surcharge permanent to provide a more stable funding stream for civil legal aid.”

The supplemental fee was scheduled to sunset in January 2012, but in July 2011 the sunset provision was extended until December 2014, again led by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

This report outlines the cumulative results of the Access to Justice Act (42 Pa. C. S. Section 4901 et. seq.) during the eight fiscal years since its passage — 2004 through 2011. In summary, the report finds that AJA has:

- **Addressed and, in many cases, resolved critical legal problems** for more than 230,000 low-income Pennsylvanians.
- **Aided some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents:** children, seniors, people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, and veterans returning from service.
- **Boosted the economy of communities across the state by more than a half-billion dollars.** AJA-funded legal assistance enabled low-income clients to secure \$162 million in direct federal benefits for which they otherwise might have been denied. As these federal benefits were spent locally on necessities, the federal dollars circulated through local economies producing an additional \$302 million in income for businesses and more than 2,245 jobs for working Pennsylvanians.

State and local taxpayers also have been spared an additional \$66 million in costs that, without legal

assistance, would have been incurred in providing emergency shelter for families facing eviction or foreclosure, and urgent medical care for victims of domestic violence. And AJA funding has enabled the civil court system to operate more smoothly by supporting legal assistance to low-income clients and assistance to self-represented litigants in navigating the court system.

Legal Aid is a cornerstone of the Pennsylvania civil justice system.

In fiscal years 2004 through 2011, Access to Justice Act funding supported work on 117,632 legal cases, directly benefitting low-income individuals and families who needed legal assistance for critical legal problems, such as domestic violence, foreclosure, eviction, utility shutoffs, denial of medical care, and loss of custody of their children. This legal assistance has been provided in every county of the Commonwealth. Funds are allocated across the state, primarily under a U.S. Census-based formula.

Legal assistance providers comprising the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) have strategically applied AJA funds to maximize the benefits produced for low-income people, communities, taxpayers and courts across Pennsylvania.

In FY 2011, the most recent year for which data are available, 45,200 Pennsylvanians obtained direct benefits from Legal Aid as a result of AJA funding. The services they received include legal representation

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Introduction: Overview of the AJA *(continued)*

(Continued from page 2)

in court or administrative proceedings, advice and counsel, legal information, brief services, such as a letter or telephone call on the client's behalf, and referrals to other service providers.

The Access to Justice Act provides a foundation of stable funding for Legal Aid.

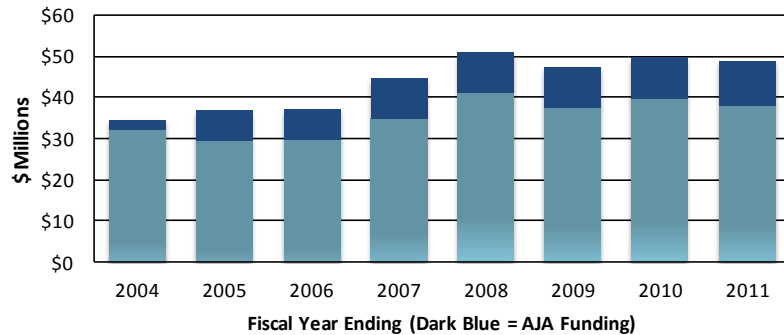
AJA has provided stable, predictable funding totaling \$11 million, or 22 percent of all Pennsylvania Legal Aid funding, in FY 2011 and a cumulative \$67 million from fiscal years 2004 through 2011. This amounts to an average of \$8.4 million per year for legal assistance providers in Pennsylvania.

AJA has enabled Legal Aid to narrow the "justice gap" between the legal needs that people face

every day and the legal resources available to meet them.

Due to a shortage of resources and increased demand in recent years, however, Legal Aid still must turn away one out of every two people who is otherwise eligible and applies for needed legal representation, denying critical legal help to thousands of people a year. ■

Impact of AJA on Total Legal Aid Funding, FY 2004-2011



Without AJA Funding, the Legal Needs of Many Individuals and Families Would Go Unmet

Without a temporary or permanent extension of the Access to Justice Act, which is set to expire in November 2012, thousands of low-income people would be harmed.

In total, at least 45,200 fewer people in Pennsylvania each year would directly benefit from legal assistance, which include:

- **At least 22,300 fewer low-income people** would be protected from the loss of housing and assisted with other critical life problems.
- **At least 12,800 fewer women and their children** would be protected each year from domestic abuse or have their lives stabilized through Protection from Abuse orders, child custody, and family law representation.
- **At least 3,700 fewer veterans, disabled persons, and seniors** would receive legal help each year obtaining federal disability benefits, including access to federal medical programs, or moving from welfare to work.
- **At least 6,100 fewer low-income people** would be protected from homelessness each year or have their substandard housing made safe and habitable.
- **At least 300 fewer deserving children** annually would have the child support and legal assistance they need to stay in school and have a decent chance at later success in life.



Legal Aid: Whom We Serve and How We Help

Snapshot: Family Saved from Violent Father. “Sheila,” a mother of two children, ages 6 and 2, lived in terror with the children’s father. One night in a rage, the father punched Sheila in the face several times, pulled her hair, kicked her with his steel-toed boots, then forced her and the children into his car. The father sped off recklessly with the family on board and told Sheila he would kill her. When he spotted police lights approaching, the father pulled the car over, jumped out and ran. Having recently been released from prison on bail, the father was charged with several crimes by the prosecutor. Legal Aid helped Sheila get a court order evicting the father from the home and protecting Sheila and the children from any further contact with the father. Sheila reports her children are starting to feel safe again in their own home, and she has hope for her family’s future.

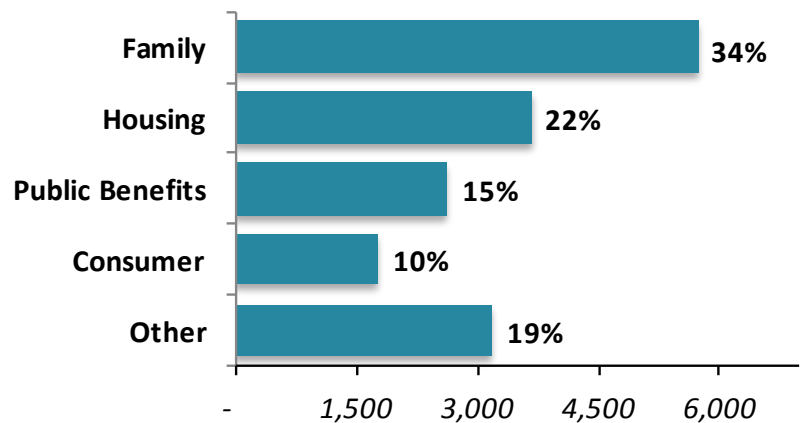
Snapshot: Foreclosure Set Aside and Home Saved. “John” came to Legal Aid after receiving an ejection notice from a bank that he was being kicked out of his foreclosed home. His Legal Aid lawyer reviewed the documents and discovered that the bank in the foreclosure proceeding failed to provide John with the required notice of the local county court’s mortgage diversion program, which is intended to help people stay in their homes. On that basis, Legal Aid filed a motion to set aside the foreclosure, and the bank conceded. After John attended the mortgage diversion counseling session, he qualified for mortgage assistance that helped refinance his loan, resulting in more affordable monthly payments and enabling him to keep his home and his equity.

FAMILY:

5,728 Cases Closed in FY 2011

- **Legal Problems Include:** Domestic abuse, divorce and child custody disputes.
- **Key Facts:**
 - » Studies show that Legal Aid is an essential public service for reducing domestic violence.
 - » Preventing domestic violence reduces the likelihood children will grow up to be abusers and saves taxpayers an estimated \$3,400 per case in medical, counseling and law enforcement costs.

AJA-Funded Cases Closed FY 2011: 16,960



HOUSING:

3,675 Cases Closed in FY 2011

- **Legal Problems Include:** Landlord-tenant disputes, mortgage foreclosure, and subsidized housing disputes.
- **Key Facts:**
 - » Legal Aid’s advocates help keep families in their homes.
 - » Preventing homelessness for one family saves state taxpayers an estimated \$14,800 per year in emergency shelter costs.

Legal Aid: Whom We Serve and How We Help (continued)

PUBLIC BENEFITS:

2,627 Cases Closed in FY 2011

- **Legal Problems Include:** Denial of benefits, including Medicaid or Medicare benefits, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)/other welfare, Social Security and veterans' benefits.
- **Key Facts:**
 - » Using AJA funds, Legal Aid has increased federal benefit payments to low-income Pennsylvanians by \$162 million since FY 2004.
 - » Legal Aid's success securing federal benefits for clients greatly reduces the need for state and local government assistance payments.



CONSUMER:

1,760 Cases Closed in FY 2011

- **Legal Problems Include:** Bankruptcy, debt collection, predatory lending, utility cutoffs, and health care denials.
- **Key Facts:**
 - » Without help from Legal Aid, victims of consumer fraud — many of them elderly — could lose savings and income they desperately need for food and shelter, winding up on welfare rolls.
 - » A little bit of legal help goes a long way. In many consumer cases, opposing parties back off as soon as a Legal Aid advocate makes a telephone call, writes a letter or files a legal action.

Snapshot: *Senior Overcomes Food Stamp Refusal.* "Bob" is an elderly man with renal cancer and other serious health problems who was going hungry because much of his income was spent on co-pays for medical expenses. Bob applied for government nutrition assistance and was notified that he would receive just \$16 a month in food stamps based on his income. With nowhere else to turn, Bob contacted a Legal Aid attorney, who advised him to appeal the food stamps determination. After Legal Aid helped Bob document all of his medical expenses to a county assistance caseworker, his food stamp allowance was raised to \$106 per month, and he received three months' back benefits. Now Bob is able to purchase an adequate amount of food and can focus on getting healthy.

Snapshot: *Disabled Man Gets Back on His Feet.* "Stanley," a disabled single man with a severe heart condition, went without natural gas service for more than 16 months due to an inability to pay. Because he relied upon natural gas for heat, hot water, and cooking, Stanley was forced to abandon his home. After suffering his fourth heart attack, Stanley contacted Legal Aid, which assisted him on several fronts. A Legal Aid advocate helped Stanley obtain medical benefits, secured assistance for him from the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and helped him enter into the utility company's customer assistance program. Stanley's natural gas service was restored, he returned home, and his outstanding balance and future monthly natural gas payments were greatly reduced.

Pennsylvania Faces a Critical “Justice Gap”

Measuring the “Justice Gap” in Pennsylvania

Low-income Pennsylvanians with serious legal problems face a “justice gap”:

- **Thousands of people a year are denied legal assistance**, as Legal Aid intake workers — due to a lack of resources — must turn away one out of every two otherwise eligible people who applies for services. Many others in Pennsylvania do not even apply.
- **Only 20 percent** of low-income Pennsylvanians who experience a legal problem are able to get legal help from any source.

Even with Access to Justice Act funds benefitting more Pennsylvanians, half the people who seek Legal Aid must be turned away for lack of resources, and many others do not even apply. Only one in five low-income Pennsylvanians having a critical legal problem receives legal help from any source. The remaining 80 percent face a “justice gap” in which they must face legal problems and navigate the court system on their own. Many people without legal assistance are overwhelmed and simply give up, losing their homes, income, health benefits, and custody of their children as a result.

Pennsylvanians — and Americans in general — support closing the “justice gap.” The Pennsylvania Bar Association, representing the state’s 30,000-member legal community, supports providing legal counsel whenever basic human needs are in jeopardy, such as shelter, sustenance, safety, health or child custody. National polls consistently show that Americans strongly support the use of government funding to provide free legal help for civil matters to low-income people.

Closing the “justice gap” would strengthen Pennsylvania families by increasing their income, keeping them in their

homes, preventing domestic violence, and keeping families intact. It would strengthen communities by securing tens of millions of dollars in federal benefits that are lost each year as a result of Legal Aid’s limited resources to serve more clients. And closing the “justice gap” would streamline the court system by reducing the number of people attempting to navigate the courts without lawyers to represent them.

AJA funding supports day-to-day legal assistance.

Because resources are so limited, civil legal assistance in Pennsylvania must be rationed. Each Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) program reviews its case-acceptance priorities on a regular basis to ensure that the most compelling legal needs in the area it serves are targeted. Community input is valued and sought regarding Legal Aid’s priorities through client surveys, interviews and meetings with representatives of partner agencies, such as human service providers, faith-based organizations, schools, job centers, bar associations and the courts.

In 2003, PLAN providers and PA IOLTA created a statewide vision and plan for the most effective use of AJA

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Pennsylvania Faces a Critical “Justice Gap” (continued)

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funds, and have continued that planning in recent years. Pooling the information from their individual assessments of urgent legal needs, PLAN providers and PA IOLTA have examined persistent and emerging client needs in light of the legislative intent and requirements of the statute.

Adhering to this plan, the bulk of AJA funding has been applied to support day-to-day legal assistance aimed at those problems determined to be of the highest priority by each Legal Aid provider. As reflected on pages 4-5 of this report, the priorities, and the cases handled, include: family, housing, public benefits, and consumer needs.

Specialized projects multiply the AJA’s impact.

As an important adjunct to locally derived priority setting, the plan for AJA-funded services launched two specialized projects that address growing levels of need in two legal specialty areas: employment law and public benefits law.

These projects provide specialized funding to regional service providers to ensure that clients everywhere in the state have access to representation in these critical substantive areas. In addition, PLAN’s specialized projects enhance the individual efforts of the eight regional service providers through coordination, training and sharing of best practices. ■

People in Poverty and Their Legal Needs

Poverty is pervasive across the urban and rural stretches of Pennsylvania:

- **Nearly two million people in Pennsylvania** — 811,000 households — are living on incomes less than 125 percent of the federal poverty level, which is about \$13,600 a year for an individual or \$28,000 for a family of four.
- **One in six** Pennsylvanians is eligible for free civil legal aid as a result of their poverty status.
- **One in four** residents in the city of Pittsburgh lives in poverty, as does **one in four** residents of rural Greene County.
- **About 819,000 legal problems** are experienced annually by low-income people in Pennsylvania, based on a national study by the American Bar Association indicating an average incidence of 1.01 legal problems per household per year. That study, as well as legal need studies conducted in several states, show that approximately half of low-income households experience at least one legal problem each year, and many experience two or more interconnected legal problems.



Legal Aid Produces Economic Impacts that Benefit Everyone in Pennsylvania

The economic impacts of Legal Aid ripple outward to benefit the entire community.

The \$67 million for Legal Aid awarded by AJA since 2004 (see chart on page 3) has lifted the state and local economies by more than *half a billion dollars*. During this period, AJA-funded legal assistance has produced federal benefit payments to low-income Pennsylvanians totaling \$162 million. Through the “economic multiplier effect,” these dollars have further boosted the economies of local communities by \$302 million (see graphic below). And Legal Aid has yielded an additional \$66 million in cost savings for taxpayers and communities, greatly reducing the need for state and local government assistance payments.



The unmet need for Legal Aid costs money for all Pennsylvanians. Legal Aid could do much more with additional funding. The state’s economy loses tens of millions of dollars each year because unrepresented Pennsylvanians lose federal benefits, such as Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income, for which they are legally eligible but have been denied. State and local governments must step into the breach, spending tax funds that could otherwise address other pressing needs in their communities. In addition, hospitals, doctors and other health care providers must write off the cost of providing emergency care that otherwise could have been covered by federal Medicaid payments had eligibility been won for clients by Legal Aid. ■

Civil Legal Aid’s “Economic Multiplier Effect” in Pennsylvania

1 Legal Aid Secures Federal Benefits

With AJA-funded Legal Aid, more than 7,000 Pennsylvanians obtained federal benefits for which they were eligible, but had been denied, from fiscal years 2004 through 2011:

\$162 Million in Federal Benefits

- » Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income benefits
- » Federal share of Medicaid benefits

2

Federal Benefits Stimulate Local Economies

Most of the money from federal benefits was spent immediately on necessities. In turn, these federal funds provided income for local businesses and wages for working Pennsylvanians.

Necessities for Families:

- » Food and housing
- » Health care
- » Prescriptions
- » Utilities
- » Transportation

3

Communities Experience a Big Multiplier Effect

Each federal dollar circulated 1.86 times* (\$162 million in federal benefits multiplied by 1.86) in local communities:

\$302 Million* for Local Economies in Pennsylvania

- » Income for local businesses
- » 2,245 jobs for people across Pennsylvania

**Total impact was estimated by applying the widely accepted U.S. Department of Commerce "Regional Economic Multiplier" for payments to low-income families in Pennsylvania, indicating that every federal dollar brought into Pennsylvania circulates through local economies 1.86 times and every million dollars supports 13.84 jobs.*

Fact Sheet: \$530 Million Economic Impact of AJA-Funded Legal Aid throughout Pennsylvania Since 2004

The total economic impact of AJA-funded legal assistance to the low-income community supported by the Pennsylvania Access to Justice Act from FY 2004–2011 was \$530 million, a return on investment of nearly *eight times* the \$67 million in AJA-allocated funds.

The Impacts Include:

\$464 million in direct economic benefits for Pennsylvania’s local communities.

The total economic benefits generated during the period FY 2004 through FY 2011 include:

- ◆ **\$115 million** in Social Security Disability benefits and Supplemental Security Income attained for low-income Pennsylvania residents;
- ◆ **\$47 million** in the federal share of Medicaid benefits attained for low-income and disabled Pennsylvania residents; and
- ◆ **\$302 million** for local communities through the economic multiplier effect (1.86 times the \$162 million in federal funds listed in the bulleted items directly above).
- ◆ **2,245 jobs** for Pennsylvania workers, with every million dollars in federal funds brought in supporting 13.84 jobs.

An additional \$66 million in cost savings for Pennsylvania taxpayers and communities.

These savings include:

- ◆ **\$34 million** in savings in emergency shelter costs. During fiscal years 2004 through 2011, a total of 2,311 low-income Pennsylvania families successfully avoided homelessness thanks to legal help by AJA-funded Legal Aid. Studies show an average savings of \$14,794 per family for taxpayers.
- ◆ **\$32 million** in savings in costs related to domestic abuse. Legal Aid advocates, supported by AJA, enabled 9,384 Pennsylvania families to be protected from domestic violence during fiscal years 2004–2011. Studies indicate an average savings of \$3,462 per family in the costs of medical care for injured victims, targeted education and counseling services for affected children, and law enforcement resources.

Additional Benefits (*not quantified*):

- ◆ **Savings** linked to crime prevention and reduction in law enforcement assistance.
- ◆ **Savings** realized by keeping children in school whose attendance would otherwise have been interrupted by homelessness and/or domestic abuse.
- ◆ **Revenue** for Pennsylvania hospitals and other health care providers from Medicaid reimbursements for services they would otherwise have to write off.
- ◆ **Efficiencies** in Pennsylvania courts due to representation of clients and provision of training and materials for self-represented litigants on how to follow court procedures.
- ◆ **Additional tax revenue** from jobs preserved as a result of Legal Aid’s employment cases and from earnings of businesses and their workers supported by the “economic multiplier effect.” ■

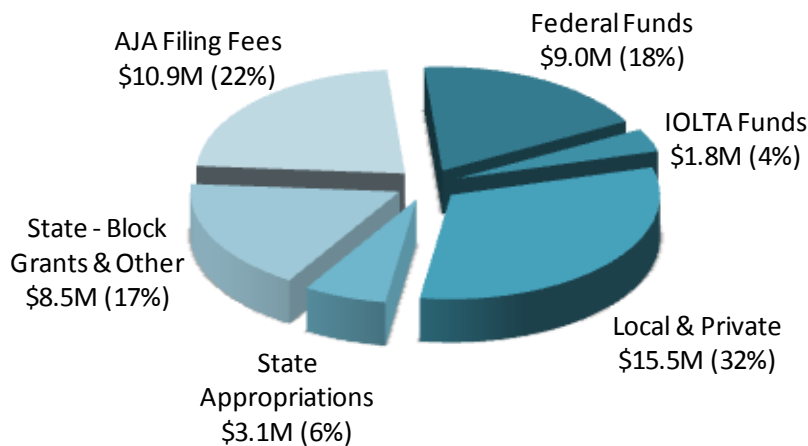
The Access to Justice Act Provides a Foundation of Stable Funding for Legal Aid

Since fiscal year 2004 under the Access to Justice Act (AJA), an initial \$2 surcharge on state court filings and a 2009 supplemental \$1 surcharge on state court filings has generated \$67 million to provide civil legal aid to low-income Pennsylvanians.

Prior to passage of the Access to Justice Act in 2002 and the supplemental fee in 2009, the

the gap between legal needs and available resources is still great, AJA funding has enabled Legal Aid to continue progress in its effort to serve more clients, improve the quality of services, connect with hard-to-reach client segments, increase economic impacts, and in many other ways improve the lives of low-income Pennsylvanians across the state.

**Total Funding for Legal Aid
FY 2010-2011**



Pennsylvania Legal Aid community struggled to keep up with the need for legal assistance in the face of rising costs and federal funding cuts, as well as a low level of state funding, which has remained flat for over 30 years. AJA funding has made a significant difference in that picture. Although

AJA funding sustains Legal Aid when other funding sources cannot.

In the eight years since its enactment, the AJA filing-fee surcharge has provided a stable, predictable funding stream that helps to even out the ebbs and flows of other funding sources.

In FY 2009, AJA supplemental fee funding mitigated the impact of a 70-percent decrease in IOLTA funding caused by the national economic crisis and falling interest rates. Since then, IOLTA plummeted an additional 37 percent to \$1.8 million in FY 2011, as a direct result of interest rates having dropped to their lowest levels in history.

In addition, a 14.8 percent cut in federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funding enacted by Congress in the FY 2012 budget would have had a devastating impact on Legal Aid

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AJA Provides Stable Funding for Legal Aid (continued)

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programs without the mitigating effect of the AJA. In Pennsylvania, the Congressional budget cut came on the heels of losses in per-capita LSC funding due to shifts nationally in the distribution of the poverty population between 2000 and 2010.

AJA dollars play a critical role in minimizing the need for layoffs and office closings in Legal Aid programs across the state. Without AJA funds, some 45,000 fewer Pennsylvanians would be able to receive legal assistance each year (See fact box on page 3 for details).



The roller-coaster effect in Legal Aid funding exacts a steep price in productivity and effectiveness of the state's civil justice system. The uncertainty in funding leads to a high turnover of Legal Aid advocates, with the cost to hire and train each new

lawyer estimated to be about \$45,000.

AJA funding leverages a significant private sector contribution from the private bar throughout Pennsylvania.

Not included in the funding chart shown on the previous page is a major in-kind contribution by Pennsylvania's legal community.

From FY 2004-2011, private attorneys and law firms donated 174,513 hours of pro bono services to Legal Aid clients, worth \$26 million. These contributions were made in the context of organized pro bono programs operated by Legal Aid programs or in partnership with local bar associations, and leveraged, in part, with Access to Justice Act funds. Pro bono attorneys handled a total of 49,015 cases, about seven percent of the total cases handled for Legal Aid clients in fiscal years 2004-2011. ■



Conclusion: AJA Funding is a Sound Investment

This report provides evidence that funding for Legal Aid from the Pennsylvania Access to Justice Act has produced dramatic results: preventing and resolving legal problems and increasing economic prospects for low-income people and



communities across Pennsylvania, while reducing costs for state and local taxpayers.

The loss of funding from AJA, which will sunset in November 2012 without action by state lawmakers, would result in a significant setback for low-income Pennsylvanians and for legislators, bar leaders, courts and Legal Aid advocates striving to narrow the “justice gap” between the critical legal needs people encounter each day and the resources available to meet them.

The stable funding stream produced by the AJA filing-fee surcharge has been applied strategically by the legal assistance providers comprising the

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) to maximize benefits to low-income people and communities, which, in economic gains alone, has far exceeded the dollars invested. As outlined in this report, \$67 million in AJA funds generated since FY 2004 has produced \$530 million in total income and savings for residents and communities.

Even more vital are the intangible results. AJA-supported legal assistance stabilizes and sustains families, saves people’s homes from foreclosure, secures federal benefits denied eligible Pennsylvanians, maintains communities and makes society safer. It helps prevent legal problems that would further clog the court system. And legal assistance helps people become self-sufficient and participate fully and effectively in society.

Making the Access to Justice Act permanent would ensure the continuation of the legal, social, and economic benefits extending to every Pennsylvania community, as documented in this report. By enacting this important change, Pennsylvania’s lawmakers would demonstrate the state’s commitment to ensuring basic fairness for all Pennsylvanians that is the cornerstone of a civilized society. ■





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Contact Information Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.
The Louise Brookins Building
118 Locust Street • Harrisburg, PA 17101-1414
Phone 717-236-9486 or 800-322-7572 • Fax 717-233-4088



Fourteen Legal Services Programs Comprise the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network

