

*Serving Bucks, Chester,  
Delaware and Montgomery  
Counties Since 2001*

**Mission**

Our mission at LASP is to provide quality legal representation to low-income people, to empower them to solve problems without legal representation through legal education and increased access to the courts, and to change community practices and systems that cause or aggravate poverty.

**Elizabeth C. Price**

President

**Elizabeth Wood Fritsch, Esq.**

Executive Director

215-781-1111 x204

**Harvey Strauss, Esq.**

Executive Director

610-275-5400 x117

***“Injustice anywhere is a  
threat to justice everywhere.”***

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Please Note: Articles in this newsletter are intended to provide general information and not specific legal advice. If you have a specific legal problem, you should consult an attorney or call our toll-free Helpline at 1-877-429-5994.

# THE *Voice*

## Protecting Domestic Violence Victims



The Protection From Abuse (PFA) Act is one of the most effective strategies protecting victims from injury and reducing future violence. Since Pennsylvania became the second state in the country to pass this type of civil legislation in 1976, Legal Aid attorneys have helped tens of thousands of victims of domestic violence, regardless of income, obtain PFA orders of protection.

In the past 12 months, Legal Aid handled 1,427 PFA cases, obtaining orders of protection for 1,231 adult clients and children. LASP's PFA legal services are available at no cost to any victim of abuse, regardless of gender, sexual preference, age, or immigration status.

This work would not be possible without strong community partners. Hundreds of pro bono attorneys volunteer represent domestic violence victims in court. In Bucks County, the United Way has supported LASP's PFA services for 15 years, and the County Commissioners support LASP's Doylestown Offices.

In all four counties, staff attorneys partner with and refer to local domestic violence and victim service advocates. Delaware County staff attorney Suzanne Noble has been honored by the Domestic Abuse Project and by Women's Way for her work with domestic violence victims. Montgomery County Staff Attorney Susan Strong is an active member of the Domestic Violence Legal Network and the Victim-Witness Policy Board. LASP's Chester County division partners with the local bar association to provide Continuing Legal Education in PFA law for attorneys who agree to volunteer in PFA cases.

Legal Aid staff and volunteers work for a day when no one is in fear of violence at the hands of loved ones. Until then, they are committed to making the Protection From Abuse Act available to all in need.

## The Crisis Continues:

### *Adapting to Increased Need for Housing Services*

As the economy has made it more difficult for people to stay in their homes, the demand for legal help with housing issues has dramatically increased. This is particularly true in the case of mortgage foreclosure. In the first nine months of 2009, Legal Aid opened 397 mortgage foreclosure cases, 99 more than during that same time period a year before. This echoes national predictions that the foreclosure crisis won't peak until sometime in 2010.

Our work in this area is often done in collaboration with other public and private agencies. Under the Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling Initiative administered by Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), LASP works with housing counseling agencies in all four counties to provide legal advice to those who have fallen behind in their mortgage payments and need to know their legal rights and options.

In Chester, Delaware and Montgomery County LASP continues to operate the Don't Borrow Trouble Helpline, (1-888-275-8843), a campaign created initially to combat predatory lending practices but now open to all who are experiencing foreclosure problems. In Bucks, where there is no access to the Don't Borrow Trouble Helpline, LASP has been working with the county court on a mortgage foreclosure diversion project, finding pro bono attorneys to assist homeowners at mandatory settlement conferences with lenders.

Finally, and most recently, in Bucks, Delaware and Montgomery counties, LASP is part of the system of services funded by the Federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing program. Under this program LASP provides legal advice and representation to those in danger of being denied or losing their rental housing through evictions and other legal measures.

Low-income individuals in need of help with housing legal problems can call the Helpline (1-877-429-5994) for advice and referral to a Legal Aid attorney or other housing resources.

**DON'T  
BORROW TROUBLE®**

**SUBURBAN PHILADELPHIA**

**1-888-275-8843**

### **DON'T BORROW TROUBLE NOW A PROGRAM OF LASP**

The Don't Borrow Trouble Suburban Philadelphia campaign was launched by a large coalition of county and private non-profit agencies to combat predatory lending in the housing market. In 2005, Community Impact Legal Services (CILS), one of the lead organizations in the coalition, sub-contracted with LASP to provide the Don't Borrow Trouble (DBT) Helpline to assist people with questions and concerns arising from bad loans. Since that time, the DBT Helpline has expanded its mission to assist those at risk of mortgage foreclosure.

Beginning December 1, 2009, LASP will assume full ownership of the program and continue its critical work. Residents from Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties can call the helpline Monday through Thursday, 9 am – 1 pm, at 1-888-275-8843.

*Prepared by Legal Aid of  
Southeastern Pennsylvania*

This fact sheet is intended to provide general information and not specific legal advice. The law often changes. Each case is different. If you have a specific legal problem, you should consult an attorney or call the LASP Helpline toll-free at 1-877-429-5994.

*Se habla español.*

## WHAT IS ABUSE?

*The law says that abuse is*

- *Causing or trying to cause physical harm*
- *Rape or sexual assault*
- *Physical or sexual abuse of minor children*
- *Putting you in reasonable fear of immediate serious physical harm*
- *Repeatedly committing acts that cause you reasonable fear of bodily injury, or interfering with your freedom of movement*

## How to Stop Abuse or Harassment

*In Pennsylvania, victims of domestic violence can get protection orders under a law called the Protection from Abuse (PFA) Act. Here is how the PFA Act can help you if you are being abused.*

### Who can ask for a PFA?

The law says you must have a certain relationship with the alleged abuser to gain protection; the abuser and victim can be family/household members, sexual/intimate partners or persons who share biological parenthood.

### What can a PFA order do for me?

A PFA order can do the following:

- Direct an abuser not to abuse, threaten or harass or stalk you
- Evict or exclude the abuser from your residence
- Prohibit the abuser from contacting you
- Grant you temporary custody of your minor children
- Grant you temporary child or spousal support
- Prohibit the abuser from having any guns or gun permits
- Other relief the judge believes is just and appropriate

### How do I get started?

You can bring a lawsuit in court by filing a paper called a petition for protection from abuse. You can file this petition at the county courthouse on your own or with the help of an attorney. In the petition, you will be asked to describe the abuse and ask the judge to issue you a temporary protection order until the hearing. *Your local Legal Aid of Southeastern PA office can help you after you have filed the petition. (See the other side of this fact sheet for where to get help in your county).*

### After I file, then what?

A court date will be set quickly. A temporary PFA order may be entered to protect you until the hearing. Legal Aid of Southeastern PA may be able to represent you at the hearing. At the hearing the alleged abuser may enter into an agreement to stay away from you. If not, the judge will listen to all the evidence and decide if abuse has occurred and, if so, what conditions to enter for the final order to prevent further abuse.

**FREE HELP IS AVAILABLE FOR VICTIMS OF ABUSE**  
*in each of the four counties that LASP serves*

**Bucks County**

***A Woman's Place***

1-800-220-8116

24 hour hotline, shelter, counseling and legal assistance; emergency help.

***LASP/Bucks County***

215-340-1818

Help filing protection from abuse petition and free legal representation at protection from abuse hearing after petition is filed.

***Crime Victims Law Project***

215-343-6543

Free legal services to assist victims of sexual assault and stalking with legal issues related to the abuse or stalking.

**Chester County**

***Domestic Violence Center of Chester County***

610-431-3546

24 hour hotline, shelter, counseling, assistance with filing a petition for protection from abuse order, emergency help.

***Chester County Family Court***

610-344-6405 (Sara Moix)

File petition for protection from abuse order here, weekdays.

***LASP/Chester County***

610-436-4510

After petition is filed, contact LASP for free legal representation at protection from abuse hearing.

***Crime Victims Law Project***

610-566-6463

Free legal services to assist victims of sexual assault and stalking with legal issues related to the abuse or stalking.

**Delaware County**

***Domestic Abuse Project***

610-565-4590

24 hour hotline, shelter, counseling, assistance with filing a petition for protection from abuse order; emergency help.

***Office of Judicial Support***

610-891-4370

File petition for protection from abuse order here, weekdays.

***LASP/Delaware County***

610-874-8421

After petition is filed, contact LASP for free legal representation at Protection from Abuse hearing.

***Crime Victims Law Project***

610-566-6463

Free legal services to assist victims of sexual assault and stalking with legal issues related to the abuse or stalking.

**Montgomery County**

***Women's Center***

610-279-1548, 800-773-2424

24-hour hotline and counseling; emergency assistance.

***Laurel House***

800-642-3150 (TTY 888-883-0770)

24 hour hotline, shelter, counseling, legal assistance with filing a petition for protection from abuse order; emergency assistance.

***Office of the Montgomery County Prothonotary***

610-278-3360

File petition for protection from abuse order here, weekdays.

***LASP/Montgomery County***

610-275-5400 (Norristown)

610-326-8280 (Pottstown)

After petition is filed, contact LASP for free legal representation at protection from abuse hearing.

***Crime Victims Law Project***

215-343-6543

Free legal services to assist victims of sexual assault and stalking with legal issues related to the abuse or stalking.

*Insert created with help from Christine Zaccarelli, Esq and www.palawhelp.org.*



## Sick and Fired:

*Legal Aid Helps with Unemployment Comp*



As the unemployment rate continues to rise, Legal Aid has seen its unemployment compensation caseload climb by 36% in one year, from 225 to 350 new cases. With replacement jobs increasingly hard to find, denial of unemployment benefits can quickly lead to mortgage foreclosure, eviction or other family crises.

In one recent case Ms. W. (not her real name or photo) sought help from Legal Aid after losing her job for allegedly violating her employer's sick day policy. On the day in question, following office policy, she called in one-half hour before her start time to say she was sick and that she would try to come in after 9:30 if she felt better. She called again at 10:00 to say she still felt too sick to make it in and would be taking a sick day. Her employer discharged her for failing to call a second time before 9:30 and challenged her unemployment claim. The Unemployment Referee denied her benefits.

With help from her Legal Aid Attorney, she successfully appealed to the Unemployment Compensation Board of Review which overturned the earlier decision and awarded her unemployment benefits. In this difficult job climate, Ms. W. was grateful to Legal Aid for helping her to obtain unemployment assistance as she sought a new job in her field.

*with sincere*  
**THANKS**  
 TO OUR RECENT  
**DONORS**

Thanks to everyone who participated in and contributed to these recent special events:

- West Chester Trial Run:  
165 runners and more than \$17,000 raised!
- Bucks County Bar Assn Race Judicata:  
180 runners and \$7,000 raised!
- Chester County Paralegal Association Taste of West Chester:  
\$9,000 raised!
- Delaware County Bar Assn Family Law Silent Auction & Spaghetti Dinner:  
\$10,000 raised!
- Montgomery Bar Assn Golf Outing:  
\$30,000 raised!

Another round of thanks to our recent donors:

- Merck Charitable Foundation
- Independence Foundation
- Aetna
- Community Design Collaborative
- Bucks County Foundation
- Montgomery County Foundation Special Initiative Grant
- Bucks County Bar Foundation
- Eastern District of Pennsylvania Bankruptcy Conference
- WHYY/Temple University Center for Intergenerational Studies

And to the hundreds of individual donors from the legal community and the broader community who generously support the work of Legal Aid with financial contributions and volunteer service...THANK YOU!

**Bucks County**  
100 Union Street  
Doylestown, PA 18901  
215-340-1818

1290 Veterans Hwy, Box 809  
Bristol, PA 19007  
215-781-1111

**Chester County**  
222 N. Walnut Street  
West Chester, PA 19380  
610-436-4510

**Delaware County**  
410 Welsh Street  
Chester, PA 19013  
610-874-8421

**Montgomery County**  
625 Swede Street  
Norristown, PA 19401  
610-275-5400

248 King Street  
Pottstown, PA 19464  
610-326-8280

## Get Legal Help

Legal Aid of Southeastern PA provides free civil legal services for low-income residents of Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties.

**LASP Helpline**  
**Mon-Fri, 9 am-1pm**  
**1-877-429-5994**

Legal Aid of Southeastern PA also provides help with mortgage foreclosure and predatory lending problems.

**Don't Borrow Trouble Helpline**  
**Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm**  
**1-888-275-8843**

*Calls to both helplines are toll-free.  
Se habla español.*

**LASP offers educational brochures on these topics. To order copies, in English or Spanish, call the Helpline.**

Landlord/Tenant Law  
Evictions  
Security Deposits  
Public Housing  
Utility Law  
LIHEAP  
Preventing Foreclosure  
Bankruptcy

Credit Reports  
Repossessions  
Custody  
Child Support  
Divorce and Separation  
Protection from Abuse  
Unemployment Comp  
Social Security  
Medical Assistance  
Food Stamps  
Issues in Aging  
Advance Healthcare Declaration  
Power of Attorney

## Community Education and Outreach

LASP offers community legal education, staff in-service training and outreach about our services to a variety of groups in our four-county region. If you would like to schedule a LASP representative for an upcoming event, contact Harvey Strauss, Esq. at 610-275-5400 x117.