

## **CIVIL GIDEON AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE TASK FORCE SUMMARY OF 2017 ACTIVITIES**

### **Meetings:**

Full Task Force Meeting Dates: April 27; June 16; Sept. 27; Nov. 29

Leadership Strategic Planning Meetings held on March 1, 30; April 11; August 15; Sept. 13

Housing Work Group: held a number of meetings throughout the year to address strategic planning and work collaboratively on the City Council Hearing on March 20 on the eviction crisis, including meetings held on Jan 10, 26; Feb. 2, 10, 14, 15; March 3; April 18; May 9, 11; August 7; Sept. 12

The Access to Justice Work Group held planning meetings on Sept 14 and 25; and Oct. 18; Nov. 1 (planning meetings scheduled to be held every two weeks)

### **Educational Programs:**

Oct. 13 Bench Bar Session: *Access to Civil Justice in the First Judicial District: Achievements and Aspirations*

Dec. 14: Two Sessions at the Annual Public Interest Law Day CLE Program will incorporate some of the Task Force's work this year. One session will highlight the new partnership with the city to fund eviction defense work. The other session will feature the Role of Public Interest Advocates in the Movement to Assist Unrepresented Litigants and Improve Access to Justice.

**Research Paper:** *The 2016 Justice Index: Selected Best Practices for Improving Access to Justice in the Courts for Self-Represented Litigants* (Oct. 2017).

### **Additional Significant Accomplishment in 2017:**

#### ***Proposal for Pennsylvania's first Access to Justice Summit***

Members of the Task Force have been exploring the possibility of holding Pennsylvania's first Access to Justice Summit in May 2018. A small group has been formed to draft a proposal and work with PBA, other bar associations, and statewide groups on this initiative.

#### ***Report on Economic Impact of Evictions in Philadelphia***

Stout Risius Ross LLC. agreed to conduct an economic impact study of providing legal representation to tenants in eviction cases in Philadelphia on a pro bono basis. Stout is one of the largest independent, privately owned global advisory firms in the industry providing investment banking valuation & financial opinions and dispute advisory & Forensic services. Stout conducted a similar study in NYC. The consultants have visited nonprofit legal aid programs and other stakeholders in Philadelphia to gather relevant data about the eviction crisis. They hope to complete a report in the next few months.

#### ***City Funding Commitment***

On Monday, March 20, 2017 City Council held a public hearing on the eviction crisis in Philadelphia and explored possible solutions, including providing a right to counsel for tenants facing eviction. Members from the Task Force worked closely with City Council staff to help

organize the hearing. It was an inspiring event and many members of DLSC and the Civil Gideon and Access to Justice Task Force submitted written testimony and materials for the hearing as well as presented oral testimony urging Philadelphia to move toward making legal representation in eviction proceedings a right, not a privilege available only to those who can afford it. Chancellor Deborah Gross; Linda Peyton from LCD; and Rasheedah Phillips from CLS presented oral testimony. Andrew Scherer, Policy Director for the Impact Center for Public Interest Law at NY Law School, and Cathy Carr, co-chair of the Task Force, testified on behalf of the National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel. The hearing also featured the powerful testimony of a number of tenants from DLSC organizations. Click [here](#) to read the testimony of Chancellor Gross. More information is also posted on the Bar Association's [Civil Gideon Corner](#).

On June 29, 2017, city leaders announced an historical investment of \$500,000 in new funding to support increased legal aid for low-income renters who face eviction. The city released an RFP and it is anticipated that a contract for the funding will be awarded for a term beginning Nov. 15, 2017 and ending June 20, 2018. The Mayor also recently announced the formation of a new Eviction Task Force, which is charged with presenting a draft report of actionable recommendations for reducing eviction and other related findings in April for public comments and its final recommendations to the Mayor in June 2018.

As indicated below, the hearing and the related developments generated widespread national and local publicity about the eviction crisis in Philadelphia and how legal aid prevents homelessness and is a solution to the crisis. Many of the articles highlight the Association's Civil Gideon and Access to Justice Task Force and underscore the significance of this development which brings Philadelphia to the forefront of a national movement taking place in New York City, Baltimore, Boston, Washington D.C., and other cities to provide a right to counsel to low-income tenants facing eviction.

### **Summary of Publicity:**

Inquirer: [In Philly's housing court, the deck is stacked - but this woman won anyway](#)

Inquirer: Commentary: Philly tenants should have access to legal aid (Op-ed by Chancellor Deborah Gross and Cathy Carr and Joe Sullivan, Civil Gideon Task Force co-chairs); see summary of op-ed at <https://voicesforciviljustice.org/pub/17363/philly-tenants-should-have-access-legal-aid/>

PlanPhilly/WHYY: [To reduce unfair evictions tenants need lawyers.](#);

[North Philly couple suing landlord's lawyer over right to evict](#)

NBC 10: [Philadelphia City Council to Address City's 'Eviction Crisis' for Low-Income Renters](#)

CLS Philadelphia: <https://clsphila.org/learn-about-issues/eviction-crisis-philadelphia>

Generocity: [Solving Philly's 'eviction crisis' will take the city committing to free legal help](#)

PlanPhilly/WHYY: [Council hearing examines evictions, substandard housing, and possible solutions](#)

KYW/CBS 3: [Lawyers Could Ease Philadelphia 'Eviction Crisis,' Council Members Hear](#)

Philadelphia Tribune: [Eviction, tenants' right to counsel highlight at council hearing](#)

Telemundo: [Discuten desalojo de inquilinos en Filadelfia](#) (“Tenant Evictions in Philadelphia Discussed”)

Al Dia: [PECO and PGW underfire amidst Philadelphia Eviction Crisis](#)

Philly Curbed: <https://philly.curbed.com/2017/7/3/15914070/philadelphia-eviction-crisis-funding>

PHL Council: <http://phlcouncil.com/philadelphia-makes-historic-investment-fighting-eviction>

WHYY Newsworks: <http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/business-a-economy/105944-on-radio-times-eviction-crisis-in-philly>

Philly Curbed: <https://philly.curbed.com/2017/10/3/16401596/philadelphia-eviction-task-force-affordable-housing>

PlanPhilly: <http://planphilly.com/articles/2017/06/29/philadelphia-sets-aside-500-000-to-help-renters-fight-eviction>

City of Philadelphia Press Release Announcing Mayor's Appointment of a Eviction Task Force:

<https://beta.phila.gov/press-releases/department-of-human-services/mayor-announces-new-eviction-task-force/>

Shared Prosperity Philadelphia: <http://www.sharedprosperityphila.org/mayor-kenny-announces-the-creation-of-an-eviction-task-force/>