



## **NNJLS Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Program Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***What is the NNJLS Private Attorney Involvement Program?***

The NNJLS Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Program connects private attorneys who generously agree to volunteer their time and skills to low-income residents of Bergen, Passaic, and Hudson Counties who are in need of legal assistance. PAI Attorneys handle individual cases and provide representation and/or advice to clients in the areas of family, housing, consumer, public benefits, and tax law matters.

### ***How do I register to become a PAI Attorney?***

Visit [www.probononj.org](http://www.probononj.org) to register, and make sure to select Northeast New Jersey Legal Services as the organization with which you would like to enroll. Once you register and enroll through this website, you will be part of NNJLS' pro bono panel. You will also begin to receive invitation emails to low-cost CLEs offered by Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ).

### ***How many cases am I required to handle?***

We ask that registered PAI attorneys take at least one pro bono case a year. You may agree to handle additional cases if you wish.

### ***How do I receive a pro bono case to handle?***

NNJLS staff will contact you with a description of the case. If you agree to accept the case, you will receive a copy of all documents the client has submitted. NNJLS staff will then give your phone number to the client and instruct him/her to call you to set up an appointment.

### ***Do you require updates or follow up regarding the case?***

Yes. Once you have agreed to take a case, NNJLS will send you a status update form which must be completed on a quarterly basis until the case is closed. Included in the status update is a question about hours contributed. We ask that you keep track of the hours you spend on the case because (1) it helps us calculate the value of the private bar's contribution to the community and (2) it is an important part of the information that we provide to our funding sources.

### ***How does NNJLS determine a client is economically eligible for services?***

Individuals who contact NNJLS for assistance are screened to determine whether their income and assets are below our required limits. If during the course of your pro bono service you learn that the client's income or assets have changed in a way that might disqualify them from receiving services, please notify NNJLS. If we determine that the client no longer meets our eligibility requirements, NNJLS will request that you take appropriate action to terminate representation consistent with your ethical obligations to the client.

***Is there coverage for malpractice insurance if I handle a pro bono case?***

Yes. Professional malpractice insurance coverage is provided by NNJLS for all PAI attorneys for PAI cases at no cost to you.

***Do I use your letterhead or my letterhead when drafting documents related to the pro bono case?***

At the time of screening, an agreement to refer the matter to a PAI attorney is executed by NNJLS and the client. This is not a retainer agreement. Private attorneys are encouraged to execute their own retainer with the client. Once it is determined that you will handle the case, future documents should be on your letterhead.

***Should I expect to incur out-of-pocket costs if I handle a PAI case?***

No. If PAI case-related costs arise, notify NNJLS before you pay the expense. You can be reimbursed for costs approved in advance. If you do not notify NNJLS before the cost is incurred, we cannot guarantee that you will be reimbursed.

***How do I obtain a waiver for court fees on behalf of a pro bono client?***

To obtain a court fee waiver for pro bono NNJLS clients, we suggest that you use the following language when submitting pleadings to the court:

“Please be advised that this matter was referred to me by the Northeast New Jersey Legal Services Private Attorney Involvement Program and I am providing representation without charge. As a result, pursuant to Rule 1:13-2(a), filing fees are waived.”

***What do I do if a client asks me for pro bono assistance with an additional legal matter?***

You are not obligated to handle any matter other than the one referred to you by NNJLS. Whether you decide to handle the additional case is up to you, but we ask that you notify NNJLS before agreeing to take the case so that we may determine whether it falls within our priority guidelines.

***Do you provide training for PAI Attorneys?***

NNJLS provides free CLEs on various topics throughout the year for PAI Attorneys. However, we ask that PAI Attorneys only handle cases where they have experience as we do not have the resources to mentor and support those who are new to an area of law.

***What if I don't have experience, but I want to provide pro bono assistance?***

Contact Meredith Gemeiner, NNJLS PAI Director, at (201) 792-6363 or [mgemeiner@lnj.org](mailto:mgemeiner@lnj.org) to discuss how you may be able to volunteer in-house at one of the three NNJLS offices or how you can help our clients by facilitating a pro se clinic.