

THE COURTHOUSE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Tulsa County Bar Association and Legal Aid services of Oklahoma, Inc. are working with members of the Tulsa County judiciary and the Tulsa County Bar to establish the Courthouse Assistance Program (“CAP”). The goal of CAP is to provide short-term legal assistance at the courthouse, on a volunteer basis, to individuals who have the immediate need for, but cannot afford to hire, counsel in civil matters.

The objective of the program is to have a volunteer attorney available at the Forcible Entry and Detainer (“FED”) Docket. This attorney would be available to meet with unrepresented parties in the courtroom after the docket is called and, if necessary, to represent them at the hearings and/or conferences which take place that day. With the success of the FED program, the hope is to expand CAP to also cover other areas in the Courthouse in which a need exists for similar services.

Recently, both TAPA and the Paralegal Section of the TCBA have expressed interest in participating in the program. The paralegal would assist the attorney by helping the unrepresented parties to complete the qualification paperwork for Legal Aid and CAP; assisting with interviews; preparing settlement documents as necessary for cases that are successfully resolved; assisting with same-day trials as necessary for cases that do not resolve; and assisting the attorney with completion of the paperwork for Legal Aid from CAP for that particular day.

THE FED DOCKET

The FED Docket is held each Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday at 2:00 pm in Courtroom 112. The cases involve landlords who are trying to evict and/or recover rent from tenants. The Court initially calls the docket to determine who is present and which of the matters are contested and may go forward later in the afternoon. The Court then takes a recess to allow the parties in the contested matters to meet and attempt to resolve their differences. Following the recess, the Court then hears the contested matters the parties were unable to resolve during the recess.

The volunteer paralegal would be available each day to assist the volunteer attorney. The volunteer attorney would advise the qualifying parties of their legal rights and assist them in their attempts to resolve their disputes. If the disputes cannot be resolved, the volunteer attorney would then represent the qualifying parties at the hearings which would be held after the recess. The volunteer paralegal would assist the qualifying parties in completing paperwork as necessary. They would also assist the attorney in interviewing the qualifying parties as well as preparing paperwork and trial presentation as necessary.

The representation would only be for the day and for the purpose of the negotiations with the landlord and, if necessary, representing the client at the hearing that would take place later that same day. The volunteer attorney would have no further responsibility for representing a client beyond that proceeding. The volunteer paralegal would have no further responsibility for assisting a client beyond that proceeding.

THE COMMITMENT

A volunteer paralegal would commit to spend one afternoon assisting the volunteer attorney who is handling the FED docket on that day. Depending on the length of the docket, this should typically require a commitment of three to five hours on that afternoon. Given the free CLE that Legal Aid will provide to the volunteer attorneys and the number of dockets to be staffed, the volunteer attorneys are asked to commit to at least one (and hopefully more) docket every other month for the first year of the program. Volunteer paralegals may submit Legal Aid's Certificate of Attendance to NALA for CLE credit. The Court will provide a room at the courthouse for the volunteer attorneys to meet with the unrepresented parties. If the FED docket program proves successful, the hope is for the same type of commitment to another docket.

TRAINING

Legal Aid will provide training for all attorneys and paralegals who volunteer to assist with CAP. This training will be free and will qualify as CLE for the annual MCLE requirement for attorneys. NALA has approved this training for paralegal CLE credit. Contact Karen Langdon at Legal Aid, (918) 295-9422, to volunteer.