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 Story from the Saturday, February 03, 2007 Edition of the Chronicle-Telegram

Legal Aid to receive help

Brad Dicken

The Chronicle-Telegram

ELYRIA — The thinned ranks of the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cleveland's local operations are about to get some reinforcements.

The Lorain County Bar Association has formed a committee to figure out how to run a new pro bono program for local attorneys who want to help the county's poor with their legal problems.

Bar Association President Gayle Reeves said the pro bono program will supplement the work done by Legal Aid, which is currently short-staffed in the county.

"If Legal Aid does not have the ability, then we would have a pool of attorneys they could call on," Reeves said.

Legal Aid has been under pressure to add staff since December, when Elyria Municipal Court judges John Musson and Lisa Locke Graves complained that they were seeing a growing number of indigent people in their courtrooms without legal representation on civil matters.

Musson said he was pleased by the Bar Association's decision and will serve on the committee that figures out how the pro bono program will work.

"The goal is to encourage and recruit attorneys to back up pro bono legal services on a referral basis from the Legal Aid Society," he said.

Legal Aid Director of Development Melanie Shakarian said the society is happy to have the help, particularly since it is still searching for three employees to join its Lorain County staff. "Really anything is going to help us enormously," she said.

Kreig Brusnahan, vice president of the bar association, who also will serve on the committee, said local attorneys have always helped out the less fortunate, but the plan being worked on will create a better system.

"We've always had a history of being a very generous bar," he said.

In addition to having attorneys take pro bono cases, Reeves said the bar association is also hoping to begin working with agencies such as El Centro de Servicios Sociales to provide legal clinics to give free legal advice to their clients.

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