

465 Legal groups planning advice clinics

Bar association hoping to establish volunteer service to help counsel poor

By **MATT SUMAN**
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ELYRIA — The Lorain County Bar Association hopes to establish volunteer service from its attorneys and set up advice clinics to help with the legal needs of area poor people in civil cases.

Local attorneys, judges and other interested parties will form a committee in the next couple weeks to address further details of the goals to meet legal needs of the poor, said Gayle Reeves, president of the Lorain County Bar Association.

"We're looking to set up a pool of at-

torneys to take cases on an annual basis," she said. "This is not going to be a required program."

Elyria Municipal Court Judges John Musson and Lisa Locke-Graves have expressed concerns in recent weeks of people coming into court without representation in civil cases. Many of the people have said they have been turned away by the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Elyria office.

Legal Aid representatives have said legal needs of the poor is a national problem and they have to turn away

about half of the people who request help. Legal Aid, the local bar and local judges have all agreed to work together to tackle the needs of the poor in civil cases, Reeves said.

The committee also hopes to set up advice clinics for people to help determine whether they have a case, Reeves said. Local lawyers would hold the clinics for a couple hours at a time, she said.

Musson, who has agreed to be on the committee, said the ideas are step in the right direction toward dealing with unmet legal needs. Criminal defendants

who can't afford an attorney are provided with a court-appointed lawyer.

"Hopefully the committee will pick up the slack in service to the indigent population," Musson said.

Volunteers help serve more indigent people said Melanie Shakarian, director of development with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

"It is going to help incredibly," she said of pro bono work from the local bar.

But Musson said he'd still like to know if Lorain County is getting its fair share of service from the Legal Aid Society of

Cleveland. The society is still in the process of hiring a managing attorney and a staff attorney for its Elyria office, said Melanie Shakarian, director of development.

The office on Broad Street in Elyria was once its own entity and had six attorneys and support staff in the 1990s, but state and federal governments consolidated Northeast Ohio offices with Cleveland's Legal Aid branch in 2000. Besides David Dawson, deputy director for the Legal Aid

Society of Cleveland and the local managing attorney, the Elyria branch has two temporary attorneys hired under contract, a paralegal and two support staff members.

So far, Musson, Judge Jim Burge of Lorain County Common Pleas Court and Richard Panza, an Avon attorney and Lorain County's representative on Legal Aid's board, have committed to the committee, which is expected to consist of six to seven people, Reeves said.