

The Philadelphia Courts

First Judicial District of Pennsylvania

NEWS RELEASE

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FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT OPENS PENNSYLVANIA'S FIRST ELDER JUSTICE RESOURCE CENTER

PHILADELPHIA, PA -- Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas President Judge Sheila Woods-Skipper joined other judicial, city and state officials at City Hall today to officially open Pennsylvania's first ever Elder Justice Resource Center.

The center will provide direct services via volunteer attorneys and advocates experienced in senior legal issues. The center will also provide referrals for seniors, as well as educational workshops designed to inform Judges and their staff on issues of aging, capacity, elder abuse, prominent legal issues affecting seniors, and available resources for seniors. The center seeks to provide legal information which can often be difficult for the elderly to access and utilize.

With court employees providing administrative and coordination services, the Elder Justice Resource Center is also supported by numerous key service organizations including the Center for Advocacy for the Rights & Interests of the Elderly (CARIE), the SeniorLAW Center, Community Legal Services (CLS), Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA), and Temple Law School.

“As our elderly population continues to grow, it's more important than ever that we provide these necessary legal resources to help them navigate challenging questions and situations that may arise. As judges we hear horror stories about seniors who've been taken advantage of or lost their homes because of limited or no access to legal help. Today we hope to start changing that for Philadelphia's elderly population,” said President Judge Sheila Woods-Skipper, who led the Philadelphia Courts' efforts to develop the new resource center.

“The new Elder Justice Resource Center is centrally located to help seniors from all over the city and provide them with a wide array of legal services, including information about how to deal

with elder abuse, custody and guardianship, predatory lending, mental and physical health, and financial planning,” Woods-Skipper said.

In addition to legal services, resources, and education, the Elder Justice Resource Center will also facilitate access to the courts by making available equipment to aid any hearing, vision and mobility challenges of seniors who are navigating the court system. Additionally, interpreter services will be provided to address language barriers. The center will routinely examine and consider implementation of other best practices recommended by the American Bar Association’s Commission on Law and Aging.

“The law affects the lives of seniors profoundly. Every day seniors are losing their homes through foreclosure and eviction, suffering shocking physical and financial abuse at the hands of family members and scammers, raising grandchildren who have been abandoned, abused or neglected. The civil justice gap in our community and our nation today affects seniors especially harshly, as great numbers go unrepresented, particularly those who are low-income or vulnerable,” said Karen Buck, executive director of SeniorLAW Center, and member of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s Elder Law Task Force.

“Philadelphia has the largest percentage of seniors of the 10 largest cities in the country, and we need to do more for those who served and built this country, who fought our battles abroad and at home, for civil rights, equality and voting rights. This center is a step forward in our work to promote access to justice, and SeniorLAW Center is proud to be a part,” Buck said

Created as a result of recommendations from the PA Supreme Court's Elder Law Task Force, a group formed during the tenure of former Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille and chaired by Justice Debra Todd, the new Elder Justice Resource Center will be a one-stop resource for elderly citizens needing legal assistance or access to legal resources.

“We have such great hope and excitement for what this Elder Justice Center is going to mean to so many people in Philadelphia,” said Debra Kroll, an associate clinical professor at Temple Law School, who specializes in Elder Law. “We envision the center to be a positive and wonderful resource helping those who otherwise would not have assistance in accessing and dealing with our judicial system.”

The Elder Justice Resource Center, located in Room 278, City Hall, will operate Monday through Friday from 9:00AM to 5:00PM. Visitors are able to walk-in, or, schedule an appointment in advance. For more information, visit www.courts.phila.gov/ejc, or call [215-686-7027](tel:215-686-7027).

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