



## **Cigna and DLA Piper continue their thriving pro bono partnership with SeniorLAW Center, serving low-income seniors in need**

Philadelphia is home to the largest percentage of senior citizens of the 10 largest cities in the country...and one of the poorest. Recognizing that elders are in need and that they've made enormous contributions to our country and communities, Cigna and DLA Piper volunteer attorneys, paralegals and notaries continued their work with SeniorLAW Center to assist older Philadelphians in the preparation of advance planning documents including simple wills, financial and health care powers of attorney, and living wills. In 2013 alone, four legal clinics were held, providing free legal services to 40 diverse senior clients: the youngest was 60 years old, and the oldest was 93. Ninety planning documents were drafted and executed at the 2013 clinics, including 25 wills, 20 advance health care directives (living wills), and over 45 financial and health care powers of attorney, allowing seniors to choose trusted individuals to make life-altering decisions when they are unable to communicate their own wishes, and help prevent guardianship and financial exploitation.

Under the leadership of Senior Counsel (and volunteer attorney) Viktoriya Torchinsky-Field, Cigna hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014 for Cigna and DLA Piper volunteers who participated in the 2013 clinics to review the partnership's accomplishments, hear stories of client experiences, and plan for the future. New volunteers were also recruited to expand capacity of this signature project. SeniorLAW Center Executive Director Karen Buck expressed great thanks to the volunteers and to the leadership of Cigna and DLA Piper, including Viktoriya, Cigna Legal Volunteer



Program Coordinator Sonja Strahm, and DLA Pro Bono Counsel Rich Gruenberger, emphasizing that seniors are suffering in growing numbers in our country, as deep senior poverty increases, especially among older women. Our country is also facing a "civil justice gap" – the gap between low-income individuals and families who need legal help and those who obtain it. Only 1 in 5 low-income Americans obtain legal help *from any source* for their critical legal needs which affect their safety, health, shelter, and quality of life.

The Cigna/DLA Piper/SeniorLAW Center partnership helps make access to justice and legal assistance a reality for those who would otherwise be unrepresented. Pro bono resources are an essential means of expanding SeniorLAW Center's capacity as a nonprofit to serve the over 10,000 Pennsylvania year who seek their help each year in wide-ranging areas of law, including elder abuse, financial exploitation, housing, consumer protection and kinship care (grandparents raising grandchildren). And it helps to provide peace of mind, independence and dignity to seniors and their families. Legal Director Wendy Bookler reported that one happy

senior, after completing her documents, was heard to say as she left the personal planning clinic, “I feel so much better. Now I will be able to sleep at night!” We invite new volunteers to join us in this important work.