



The
Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland
Since 1905

Minutes - Client Grievance Committee Meeting
Thursday, April 6, 2017
4:30 – 5:30 p.m.
1223 West Sixth, First Floor Conference Center

Committee Members in Attendance: Marcia Leavy, Vanetta Jamison, Aaron O'Brien (by phone), Gladys Reed (by phone) and Barbara Roman

Committee Member Regrets: Andre Dowdy and Edward McGhee

Staff in Attendance: Tom Mlakar and Jennifer Teeter

I. Welcome

- Marcia Leavy welcomed the committee and opened the meeting 4:33 p.m.

II. Minutes 10-13-16

- The committee reviewed the minutes. One change was made to the time of adjournment: 4:43 p.m. was changed to 5:43 p.m.
- **Action:** The committee approved the 10-13-16 minutes with the correction related to time.

III. Presentation by Dan Natalie, Intake Supervising Attorney: Responding to Denial of Service Complaints

- Mr. Natalie introduced himself to the committee and spoke about some of the client grievances that he sees and handles. Prior to Legal Aid he worked in a small immigration practice and brought some immigration experience to the Intake Group. Mr. Natalie is bilingual, which is helpful in responding to Spanish-speaking clients at intake, as well as reviewing Spanish correspondence.
- The three types of grievances that Mr. Natalie typically responds to are quality of intake services complaints, denial of service for lack of resources and denial of service for conflicts of interest. Because of case acceptance guidelines we cannot accept all cases. There are usually a few grievances a week, but it does not happen frequently. The process starts with Intake Specialists, and can escalate to the Intake Supervising Attorneys, Mr. Natalie and Lauren Gilbride. Generally grievances are handled by listening, assessing, and reviewing the intake to make sure we reached the right result. From there the caller is either satisfied or dissatisfied. If dissatisfied, the grievance goes to the Managing Attorney of the Intake/VLP Practice Group. Mr. Natalie strives to resolve the grievance in the moment, but that is not always possible. Then a client

- would be mailed the grievance form. Written grievances go the Deputy Director for Advocacy. All grievances are documented in the notes in the case management system.
- Committee members asked if Intake Specialists receive enough training on conflict resolution. Mr. Natalie thinks they are adequately prepared, but additional tools are always helpful. Intake calls are not recorded, but we do have the technology to listen to “live” intake calls and could use it if necessary. Mr. Natalie always talks to the Intake Specialist and looks at the intake notes before talking to the person who is making a grievance.
 - Some clients whom we are not always able to serve include veterans, who feel they should always get help based on their status as a veteran; denials for medical services related to particular medical procedures; custody matters that do not involve domestic violence or abuse; and housing. Private landlord/tenant cases go to pro bono attorneys, and sometimes we cannot find someone to take a case. Most of the time clients accept our limitations, and most denial of service calls are resolved at intake without further action. Intake handles about 18,000 new applications in a year – plus Legal Aid has about 2,000 open cases from prior years and of those 20,000 applicants and clients we received 88 grievances in 2015 and 117 grievances in 2016. When we do have to deny services, Intake tries to give the client a referral. Annually, about 10 denial of service grievances and about 20 quality of service grievances get referred to the Deputy Director for Advocacy.

IV. Review Client Grievances for 2016

- The committee reviewed the number, type, frequency and resolution of 2016 grievances. The grievance policy and federal regulations distinguish between quality of service and denial of service complaints. There were 100 denial of service complaints and 17 quality of service complaints. The biggest category is lack of resources, where clients meet eligibility standards, but we do not have enough attorneys.

V. 2017 Draft Goals

- The committee accomplished its 2016 goals, and discussed the 2017 goals.
- **Action:** The committee accepted its 2017 goals.

The meeting adjourned at 5:25 p.m.