



Legal Aid of North West Texas

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April 26, 2010

Ms. Cynthia G. Schneider
Office of Program Performance
Legal Services Corporation
3333 K Street NW, 3rd Floor
Washington, D.C. 20007

Re: Response to Draft Program Quality Visit Report
Sent via electronic submission

Dear Cindy:

We would like to thank you and each member of the team for the preparation and completion of the Draft Program Quality Visit Report. It is simply amazing how such a small group of people can perform such an enormous task visiting as many offices and individuals within and without the program as they did. We particularly appreciate the leadership of Stephanie Edelstein as she directed us all in what we consider to be a most productive and informative visit. We would also like to acknowledge the professionalism of the team. While remaining at arms length to accomplish their task, they were all courteous, engaging, and respectful of staff time devoted to the visit.

We have previously provided Stephanie with a few more informal comments clarifying or restating statistical and other factual statements. We would like to take this opportunity to provide a few comments regarding the substantive findings and recommendations. First and foremost, we appreciate the acknowledgment of the valuable work performed by program staff. The Report clearly identifies the many strengths they possess in delivering quality legal services to our client community through many delivery components, including direct advocacy, coordinated outreach and networking, and the involvement of the private bar. Appreciation for their work is always a boost to the daunting task of meeting the ever-increasing demand for their time.

As noted in the Report, many of the recommendations are being implemented or are otherwise in the nascent stage of development. Other recommendations will be fully explored. Overall, they have helped crystallize those areas that require prioritization. Our comments here will be in brief bullet points for your consideration in releasing the final Report.



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Performance Area One

- The Board of Directors Committee on Long Range Planning and Resource Development has been charged with overseeing the development of the strategic plan. The Board's Vice Chairman will chair that committee.

Performance Area Two

- Contact has been made with the Amarillo landlord to determine how best we can address the signage issue in this multi-tenant, multi-storied building.
- A new lease has been negotiated with the Midland landlord that will increase the size of the office. Space plans have been approved and renovations will begin in May.
- In addition to Spanish and Vietnamese, attorney staff are proficient in French, Italian, and German. In addition, other staff are proficient in Russian and Polish.
- While we continue to hire bilingual staff, we are obtaining a license from Rosetta Stone that will allow staff to learn Spanish through downloads from the internet. They can do so at the office, at home, in their car, or on their i-pod/phone while strolling in the park. Management tools allow administration to monitor the progress of learning and test retention. Over 80 members of the staff have expressed interest in this one year trial period.
- We have specifically allocated funds for translation services and recently emphasized its use on our new sharepoint intranet.
- The Legal Aid line has been expanded with additional contract attorneys, phone lines, hours of operation, and special call back times have been designated for Spanish only applicants.
- While the Report mentions the existence of our Advocacy Manual, it fails to mention a separate 139 page Intake Manual with policies and forms. While allowing for the unique circumstances of individual office service areas, the manual includes a uniform policy on intake throughout the program. It also contains guidance on case selection criteria. A small committee has recently undertaken a re-write of the case selection criteria and that document is now under review for uniform implementation. The manual itself will also undergo extensive review. We fully intend to study the recommendation of an assigned person to oversee the intake process throughout the program. Meanwhile, we wanted to note the existence of the manual and our current undertakings to address the findings in the report.

Performance Area Three

- Reflecting the program's interest in diversification of substantive areas of law and the provision of a full range of legal services, we would note that 64% of open cases on January 1, 2010 were in family law, a decrease of approximately 7% from 2009. Concomitant increases have occurred in other areas, such as Housing, Consumer, and Economic Benefits.
- Since the visit, the Executive Director addressed 116 attendees representing major

Texas corporations at the Corporate Counsel Institute, a CLE event conducted by the University of Texas. The address encouraged corporate counsel involvement in the delivery of legal services to the poor.

Performance Area Four

- At its December 2009 meeting, the Board adopted a Policy on Program Integrity (Whistleblower Policy) as well as a Fraudulent Acts Policy.
- Client Board members attend the annual Texas Clients Council meeting as well as the annual NLADA Conference. Attorney Board members attend the annual NLADA Conference. All who attend the NLADA conference participate in the board tracks at the conference.
- LANWT has received approval from the LSC to purchase new case management software, Legal Server, and is currently in the data migration phase. Full implementation is scheduled for September, 2010. A Committee representing intake interviewers, staff attorneys, middle management, senior management, accounting, private attorney involvement, development, and technology is overseeing the transition.
- The program's sharepoint intranet is fully operational and new information and policies are posted on a regular basis.
- The capital campaign is underway. With a new part-time Capital Campaign Coordinator, materials have been developed, and the Board Committee has identified key stakeholders for a possible naming opportunity. A brief tri-fold brochure accompanies this response.
- Monthly training events are now being held. Thus far, they have included case management training, sharepoint training, outlook training and appellate practice training. Fourteen managers attended the MIE Supervising Legal Work training event and thirty-five attorneys attended the annual Poverty Law Conference. Fifteen paralegals and management staff are attending the Equal Justice Conference in May.

If you have any questions regarding this correspondence, please do not hesitate to call on me. Thank you for your continuing efforts to provide assistance and guidance to legal services programs as we strive to provide services to our client community through the effective use of program resources.

Sincerely,



Errol A. Summerlin
Chief Executive Officer