

United Way Funds PLSE's First Two Pardon Hubs

August 27, 2018 – Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) announced today that it had received a \$10,000 contract from United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey (UWGPSNJ) to develop the first “Pardon Hubs” as part of United Way’s Income and Financial Stability Community Impact Program.

In this new partnership, PLSE will select two of UWGPSNJ’s Philadelphia agencies that are located in low-income, high-arrest neighborhoods. Those agencies will be taught about the creation and dissemination of criminal records, the intergenerational damage they cause to individuals, families and communities, and how those records can be erased through expungements and pardons. The agencies will then become “Pardon Hubs,” helping neighbors through those processes.

PLSE will hold community information sessions and conduct two client intake sessions per year at each Hub through its Criminal Records Expungement Project. As PLSE is seeking expungements of non-conviction data in court, the Hubs will work with the clients in their neighborhoods to prepare themselves for possible application to the Governor for a pardon. Those who successfully complete the pardon preparation program will be considered for PLSE’s Pardon Project, in which clients will be linked with volunteer attorneys and others who have volunteered to help support the pardon applicant in what is today a daunting three-year process.

“We are very excited to be launching this new partnership with PLSE,” said Nikia Owens, director, UWGPSNJ’s Income and Financial Stability Community Impact program. . “It has been estimated that 60% of the people who live in Philadelphia’s lowest income neighborhoods have criminal records, and that more than 80% of employers and landlords check those records as part of background checks. Our society can invest every dollar we have in job training and workforce development, but we have no chance to succeed if these individuals are still prevented by the bad choices they made decades ago from getting the jobs or housing for which they are qualified today.”

PLSE files and prosecutes more expungement petitions than any other agency in the country – more than 2,200 last year alone. It has worked closely with Lieutenant Governor Michael Stack since 2015 on developing and implementing a statewide Pathways to Pardons program. Following a drug summit held in January in Washington, D.C., Steven Burk, Secretary to the Board of Pardons, referred to PLSE as “lawyers who share a passion for justice, expertise in expungement, and demonstrated success in helping those once addicted to drugs unburden themselves from their criminal records histories, so they can pursue their potential.”

“People who have demonstrably turned their lives around deserve a second chance,” continued Owens. “Our new partnership with PLSE holds that promise for literally hundreds of thousands of good people who are doing their best to achieve their potentials.”

ABOUT PLSE: PLSE provides free legal representation to low income residents of Philadelphia whose criminal records are holding them back from achieving their potential as productive, contributing citizens. The services include seeking expungements in criminal court and pardons from the Governor, educating elected and community leaders, and empowering under-resourced communities to seek a greater voice and needed legislative reforms. PLSE was twice recognized in 2017 as an exemplary non-profit, with both a 2018-19 Barra Award, and the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation’s Goffman Award.

ABOUT UWGPSNJ: United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, serving communities in Pennsylvania’s Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties, and New Jersey’s Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May and Cumberland counties, is part of a national network of more than 1,300 locally governed organizations that work to create lasting positive changes in communities and in people’s lives. United Way fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community. In Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, United Way fights for youth success and family stability because we LIVE UNITED against intergenerational poverty. For more information about United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey visit www.UnitedForImpact.org.