

PLSE Names Head of Expungement Project, Hires First Staff Paralegal

MAY 13, 2019 – Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) announced today that Staff Attorney Rachel L. Miller has been named Director of the Criminal Records Expungement Project and that Robin Wynne has been hired as the organization’s first staff paralegal.

“Rachel Miller is almost uniquely qualified to lead our Expungement Project,” said Tobey Oxholm, PLSE’s Interim Executive Director. “For her entire legal career, she has helped low-income Philadelphians who are involved in the criminal justice system, gaining invaluable experience and developing relationships with people who have spent decades in Pennsylvania state prisons. She is quick to gain their trust, very effective in court, and well-respected by prosecutors and judges alike.” Immediately prior to joining PLSE in October 2018, Miller had served with the Defender Association of Philadelphia for four years as a trial attorney and thereafter as a mitigation specialist for two years, working in the Juvenile Lifer Unit.

“I know firsthand how important expungements are for those seeking better jobs, housing, education, credit and other opportunities, and the insurmountable obstacles that criminal records add to the already difficult circumstances lower income Philadelphians face,” said Miller. “The elimination of criminal records is an essential strategy for dealing not just with the legacy of mass incarceration, but with poverty. I look forward to being at the forefront of this important project.”

The appointment of Robin Wynne marks the first time that PLSE has had a paid paralegal position. “Private law firms have long known how effective paralegals are in maximizing the efficiency of attorneys,” said Oxholm. “Robin impressed us with her passion for helping people, and she is a great addition to our team.” Wynne received her Associate of Applied Science in Paralegal Studies degree from the Community College of Philadelphia and is a recipient of its Paralegal Studies Award. The position is made possible by a grant from the Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program.

These staff changes come at a time when PLSE is rapidly expanding in size and adopting a community-based approach to attacking the inter-generational harm that criminal records cause individuals, families and whole neighborhoods. In just two years, it has more than doubled in size and taken on a leadership role statewide in reforming the pardon process. With the support of the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, PLSE is creating its first two “Pardon Hubs” in Philadelphia by which community non-profits can help residents apply for pardons. PLSE expects to hire two more attorneys and another paralegal in the near future.

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, creating community-based Pardon Hubs, and empowering under-resourced communities to seek a greater voice and needed systemic reforms. PLSE is a recipient of the 2018-2019 Barra Award as an Exemplary Non-Profit Organization.