



Columbus Bar President-Elect Hon. Stephen L. McIntosh, Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray, and Columbus Bar President, Elizabeth J. Watters

Consumers Have New Option in Battling Aggressive Debt Collection

Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray teamed up with Judge Stephen McIntosh of the Franklin County Common Pleas Court and Columbus Bar President Elizabeth Watters to announce a pro bono clinic designed to help Columbus consumers in legal battles with debt collectors.

The pro bono advice clinic, hosted by the Legal Aid Society of Columbus, will provide guidance to consumers who are sued by creditors. Offered on the third Tuesday of every month, the clinic will offer advice and counsel for those trying to navigate the legal system and give consumers the opportunity to meet with an attorney one on one.

"My office has seen a dramatic increase in debt collection complaints over the past year," said Attorney General

Cordray. "The increase is a clear reflection of today's economic stress. Ohioans are in need of help, especially when it comes to battling debt collection firms in court. The legal process can be intimidating and confusing, and I strongly urge consumers facing a debt collection lawsuit to make use of the help offered through this program."

The Legal Aid Society of Columbus first launched a pilot of this program in July 2009 that was attended by 72 Columbus consumers. Through the pilot program, 27 participants received favorable case results that included dismissal, settlement or an agreed judgment entry; 26 consumers have cases still pending.

"Unfortunately, all too often in these cases, default judgments are handed down because consumers feel that

they do not have options and cannot afford representation," said Judge McIntosh. "This program will give Columbus consumers a fighting chance for a favorable resolution."

To obtain assistance from the clinic, consumers who receive a court summons and complaint for a debt collection case should call Legal Aid at (614) 241-2001 or toll free at (888) 246-4420.

"The pilot program illustrated for us that there is a real need for assistance," said Watters. "In response, we are now opening up the pro bono project not only to the general public but to attorneys throughout Franklin County. We hope that consumers take advantage of the program and also hope that attorneys continue to step up to offer assistance."