

Legal Services Get Modest Increase in State Budget

By: Amaris Elliott-Engel, Staff Reporter

Published in The Legal Intelligencer

July 09, 2008 -- State funding for legal services organizations hurting from a drop in grants from interest on lawyer trust accounts increased only \$526,000 in the state budget process last week, said Samuel Milkes, executive director of Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, the statewide coordinating organization for 10 regional legal services programs and six specialized legal resource programs.

The state budget originally proposed increasing funding by \$1 million.

Milkes said that because other appropriation items were slashed even more dramatically that legal services organizations were pleased that some increase was seen in the budget.

"We also realized when looking at the treatment of other lines it certainly represents support from the governor and the legislature that we very much appreciate," Milkes said.

Total state funding, separate from a federal services block grant, is about \$3.1 million.

The state funding for legal aid programs that provide direct services is distributed to PLAN, which then allocates according to the most recent census and the poverty populations in each area of the state.

"We're appreciative of the legislature and the governor," Milkes said. "We also appreciate how much the Philadelphia bar and the Pennsylvania bar and lawyers around the state worked hard to see this increase."

In interviews with The Legal, legal services organizations have said that every extra penny will help them because IOLTA grants are down 33 percent, or \$7.3 million, statewide in the fiscal year that started July 1.