

WHAT IS THE LAW PROJECT?

The Bergen County Mental Health Law Project is one of the community resources designed to help previously hospitalized people make a successful transition to independent living. We are the only agency in the county which addresses the legal needs of the chronically mentally ill.

We provide free legal services to eligible clients who are involved in civil matters. As a service funded by the County and the State of New Jersey, we accept only people who are unable to pay for private counsel.

Since 1977, we have represented thousands of clients in such matters as matrimonial or child custody disputes and at Social Security hearings. Our staff of attorneys provide specialized legal services and supportive advocacy as well as counseling and outreach.

The Law Project accepts referrals from the public and private mental health network, from Legal Services and from private attorneys.

BERGEN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES



JAMES J. TEDESCO III
County Executive
and the
BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS

www.bergenhealth.org

BERGEN COUNTY COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH LAW PROJECT



**One Bergen County Plaza
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(201) 634-2762
or
(201) 634-2761

THE LAW PROJECT GOALS

The Law Project offers to its unique client population legal services which are designed to help them live more comfortably in the community. Some of our specific goals are to...

- help people obtain the most advantageous available public financial benefits
- help people obtain the most advantageous and appropriate educational and vocational benefits
- help clients obtain employment commensurate with their current and potential abilities
- inform patients of their civil rights when in the hospital and in the community, and to protect them in treatment-related issues
- help people secure and maintain maximally independent decent living conditions
- help clients obtain appropriate mental health and social services
- help clients acquire maximum control over their own persons, property and affairs, consistent with their own individual capabilities
- help people obtain resolution of domestic relations problems

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

The Law Project provides SUPPORTIVE ADVOCACY for its legal clients.

We also provide OUTREACH services to hospitals and transitional programs.

The Law Project is frequently involved in PATIENTS' RIGHTS ISSUES. We represent clients in issues pertaining to: medication, confidentiality of records, right to participate in treatment planning, right to legal counsel and treatment in the least restrictive setting.

We represent clients in cases of MATRIMONIAL AND FAMILY DISPUTES, such as divorce, child custody, visitation, domestic relations problems, child placement and adoption.

The Law Project help clients who require FINANCIAL AID obtain the most advantageous benefits possible. We file appeals for clients whose Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Income has been discontinued and, when necessary, represent them at judicial hearings.

Clients are assisted in retaining current HOUSING or improved living conditions.

Law Project clients have also been assisted in Small Claims Court, in matters of tenancy, consumer issues and creditor's issues.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE

To be eligible for the Services of the Law Project individuals must meet ALL of the following criteria:

AGE: Client must be 18 years or older.

FINANCIAL STATUS: Client does not have funds to retain private counsel and client also meets federal poverty guidelines.

DIAGNOSIS: Client must be mentally disabled, with a primary emotional disability. People are not eligible if their primary diagnosis is developmental disability, retardation, organic brain syndrome or chronic substance abuse.

HISTORY: Client has been engaged in mental health treatment for many years.

FUNCTION LEVEL: Client must require substantial assistance in social skills, vocational or educational guidance and community living.

RESIDENCE: Client may be living either in the community or in a hospital and must be a legal resident of Bergen County.