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Executive Director Ann Pruitt Will Leave Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services After Nearly Nine Years at the Helm



NASHVILLE, Tenn., January 5, 2022 - Ann Pruitt, Executive Director of Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (TALS) will leave her role on March 31, 2022, after nearly nine years of service to the Tennessee access to justice community.

“Expanding partnerships and using technology to advance access to justice are hallmarks of Ann Pruitt’s tenure leading TALS” said Justice Jeffrey S. Bivins, TN Supreme Court Access to Justice Liaison.

Under Pruitt’s leadership, TALS made the search for legal help more user friendly by introducing chat bots which connect people in crisis with civil legal resources. The bots also help them find and complete court approved forms. TALS further introduced an online Legal Wellness Checkup, as an innovative preventive law tool that identifies and defines the user’s legal risk areas, providing resources to help.

“Leading TALS has allowed me to work in the space where my passion for justice, expertise in relationship building, and creativity in developing innovative solutions intersect,” Pruitt said. “My tenure at TALS has been about establishing collaborative

partnerships and using technology to make legal help more accessible to our neighbors who cannot afford to hire an attorney when they face legal challenges to meeting their basic needs. As TALS continues to refine its model and role as a statewide coordination point for the civil justice network, new leadership and fresh ideas will position TALS to continue advancing its mission to strengthen the delivery of civil legal help to vulnerable Tennesseans. I am excited to support the transition. I look forward to celebrating the fantastic TALS team and board as they build on our past success.”

In addition to leading TALS, Pruitt served on the Tennessee Supreme Court’s Access to Justice Commission from 2013 to 2020, where she co-chaired the Public Awareness Committee from 2013-2018 and served as Vice Chair of the Commission in 2019. She is a co-founder of the Tennessee Bar Association’s (TBA) Corporate Counsel Section and long-time member of the TBA’s Access to Justice Committee, which she currently chairs.

“Ann Pruitt has been the driving force in statewide collaboration since beginning her tenure at TALS,” said DarKenya W. Waller, TALS Board Chair. “Early on, she worked with the TALS board to develop a mission and vision for TALS that emphasized statewide coordination and connection. Ann has worked tirelessly with the TALS staff and board to identify potential board members beyond providers of civil legal aid to diversify and increase participation in statewide access to justice efforts and to increase funding for projects designed to implement greater access to justice in Tennessee.”

When Memphis attorney and pro bono icon Buck Lewis and his law firm Baker Donelson developed the country’s first web-based pro bono legal advice service for low income Tennesseans, now a national platform under the American Bar Association known as Tennessee Free Legal Answers, they chose TALS, under Pruitt’s leadership, as the agency to entrust with recruiting volunteer attorneys, conducting community outreach and administering the program. Perhaps the most significant illustration of Pruitt’s leadership in statewide collaboration is the growth of the TALS Equal Justice University (EJU). This growth has led statewide leaders to join the equal justice community as they learn about and celebrate the cause of equal access to justice. In 2016, Justice Jeffrey S. Bivins was sworn in as Chief Justice at the EJU conference, demonstrating access to justice as the Tennessee Supreme Court’s key priority.

Over Pruitt's nine years at the helm of TALS, she helped develop, in collaboration with the four Legal Services Corporation -funded programs, the Tennessee Senior Law Alliance (TSLA), a program that ensures Tennessee's senior adults in all 95 counties have access to help address the legal challenges that impact their lives. Pruitt was also the driving force in working with the Tennessee Department of Humans Services to develop the Cycles of Success program, which takes a two-generation approach to attacking poverty. It ensures that the wrap around legal services delivered to families not only impact the parents, but also the children within a household helping to create a cycle of success for the entire family.

The 844-HELP4TN hotline was instrumental during the tornadic activity occurring in March 2020, as a hub for statewide triage of impacted survivors. Due to Pruitt's forward-thinking management, she and other TALS staff have been invited to present at national conferences for other states to implement TALS' successes in increasing access to justice.

"Ann's accomplishments have bolstered our equal justice community. We are a stronger community because of her leadership," said Deborah Taylor Tate, Director of the Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts.

About TALS

Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (TALS) is a statewide non-profit organization that builds partnerships to support the delivery of effective civil legal services for low-income and elderly Tennesseans. TALS manages a web portal providing legal information-www.HELP4TN.org, and staffs 1-888-HELP4TN, a toll-free civil legal services referral and information phone line. Learn more at www.tals.org.

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