



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, July 8, 2021

CONTACT: Benson Gardner
Communications and Development Manager
608.620.0711 | bgardner@wistaf.org

WisTAF welcomes three institutions as “Prime Partners” in supporting justice for all

MADISON — Wisconsin’s funding channel for civil legal aid, the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WisTAF), welcomed three banks as new “Prime Partners” in the state’s Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program. The designation means that CIBC Bank USA in Milwaukee; First Federal Bank in Milwaukee and Waukesha counties; and West Pointe Bank in Oshkosh will help ensure Wisconsinites can access legal representation, advice and information when facing life-altering challenges.

“This is laudable private support that helps make justice available regardless of how much money you make, while ultimately saving money for taxpayers,” said April Rockstead Barker, president of the WisTAF Board of Directors. “Providing legal interventions, for example, to a survivor of domestic abuse can stop her problems from escalating, preventing the need for the public to provide shelter. Prime Partners help everyone in Wisconsin.”

While most people know of the Constitutional right to an attorney in criminal cases, no such guarantee exists in civil matters, even though civil law covers many situations impacting people’s fundamental needs. When people can’t afford a lawyer, they often struggle to navigate the legal system’s complexities, finding justice and stability elusive.

Nonprofit law firms and others address the issue through civil legal aid: online information, advice and legal representation for people who couldn’t otherwise afford a lawyer. Funding is pursued through public and private efforts.

The IOLTA program is one of those efforts. Established by the Wisconsin Supreme Court and administered by WisTAF, the program relies on a collaboration involving financial institutions and lawyers. The arrangement revolves around attorneys’ trust accounts, which they open at financial institutions in order to hold funds for clients. In cases where client funds are not large enough or would not remain in trust long enough to generate interest for the client, attorneys pool the funds into a single, larger IOLTA account with greater interest potential. Banks remit the interest earnings to WisTAF, which in turn administers grants that provide civil legal aid in every part of Wisconsin. People at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible to receive IOLTA-funded services.

The banks join a list of 12 institutions named “Prime Partners” because they go above and beyond IOLTA’s threshold participation requirements, voluntarily paying higher interest on the accounts as a form of community support.

“We are pleased to be recognized as a ‘Prime Partner’ by the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation,” said Brant Ahrens, president, CIBC US retail & digital banking. “CIBC works every day to strengthen our communities and our IOLTA accounts are an important part of our efforts, along with our affordable banking programs, investments in community development and contributions to organizations making a difference in our neighborhoods.”

“First Federal Bank of Wisconsin is excited to be able to offer IOLTA Trust accounts as part of our ongoing expansion of commercial account offerings,” said Brian McManus, senior vice president of lending at First Federal. “Being part of the Prime Partner program ensures that we can support funding for civil legal aid in communities throughout Wisconsin.”

“We are honored to be a part of the Prime Partner program with WisTAF,” said Brent Heiges, vice president and risk officer at West Pointe Bank. “As the oldest, locally-owned community bank in Oshkosh, we support nonprofits in our area focused on helping the underserved. Providing representation to those in need is critical to a highly functioning justice system. Thank you for welcoming West Pointe Bank to the IOLTA Prime Partner Program. We look forward to working with our attorney partners.”

(more)



[CIBC Bank USA](#) provides personal and private banking, small business banking and commercial banking solutions in Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri and Michigan. [First Federal Bank](#) is a \$340 million community bank headquartered in Waukesha, with branch locations in Bay View, Brookfield and Milwaukee. [West Pointe Bank](#) is Oshkosh's oldest locally owned, independent, full-service bank.

Established by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, [WisTAF](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works with civil legal aid organizations in the state to increase access to justice. WisTAF oversees funds and invests in services to help people resolve legal problems.

#####