



Paralegals in the Law Office ... An Important Link



MICHAEL L. TESTA
CERTIFIED CIVIL TRIAL ATTORNEY,
CERTIFIED CRIMINAL TRIAL
ATTORNEY

A paralegal is a person qualified by education, training or work experience who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, casino, real estate office, insurance company, governmental agency or other entity who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible. A paralegal may not practice law, give legal advice or represent clients in a court of law. A paralegal may not provide legal services directly to the public except as permitted by law.

Many community colleges provide programs offering a combination of general education and paralegal courses that prepare graduates to meet the growing demand for trained paralegals. The paralegal program at Cumberland County College is a two-year program approved by the American Bar Association and meets with their requirements. Students entering Cumberland County College in the paralegal program graduate with an Associate in Science Paralegal Studies.

All four of our paralegals at Basile & Testa are graduates of Cumberland County College. Three work in the plaintiff department and one works in the insurance defense department. We have provided a brief statement from each describing their duties and responsibilities as a paralegal.



Cheryl Pearce

I have been employed as a paralegal by Basile & Testa for 21 years having received my paralegal degree from Cumberland County College. I have worked in the areas of Family Law, Estates and Probate, Real Estate, commercial transactions, municipal court, corporate and civil defense litigation.

I assist the attorney in file organization and maintenance, preparation and filing pleadings, correspondence, obtaining discovery, scheduling defense medical examinations, site inspections, preparation of closing documents and telephone work.



Karla Harris

I have been a paralegal for over 20 years. Over the years, I have been exposed to many areas of the law. Each area certainly is unique. I became most specialized in personal injury. This area includes product liability, medical malpractice and auto negligence. It is an area of the law that requires a paralegal to be extremely hands on with the clients. I am responsible for daily contact ranging from meeting with clients, drafting correspondence, and speaking with doctors and physician's assistants in order to keep the attorney updated on a client's medical condition. Other times I am talking with insurance agents and adjusters, gathering medical reports, or dissecting and interpreting medical terminology in order to document and support a client's claim

for damages. The background work culminates in keeping the attorney informed of the client's current medical treatment and working towards assisting the attorney with all necessary documentation to prepare the case for settlement negotiations or trial.

Each case may seem similar however, each is unique and it is the job of the paralegal to understand and inform the attorney of the extent of the client's injuries and how the client's life has been affected by the "accident or incident" causing personal injury.



Gwen Barber

I have been a paralegal for 14 years; however, I have been working in the legal field for 19 years. During these 19 years, I have worked in various different areas of the law such as collection, defense, criminal and personal injury.

For the past 8 years, I have been focused on plaintiff work, which includes personal injury and medical malpractice. Personal injury cases can involve injuries resulting from instances such as, an automobile accident or slip and fall. Medical malpractice cases are more complex. In the State of New Jersey, you need to have an expert, consisting of a licensed physician, who renders the opinion that there is medical negligence.

As a plaintiff paralegal, I am responsible for my files from the beginning until the end of the case. I open the file, stay in touch with the client regarding their medical treatment, and obtain their medical records, making sure the case is ready for any court proceedings that are scheduled. As a paralegal, you need to be independent in your working duties as the attorney expects you to know the laws and what the next step will be

in each case. The file must be organized and ready so that the attorney can easily find what he needs during a deposition, arbitration or trial.



Linda Bradway

I am a plaintiff personal injury paralegal to attorney Michael L. Testa. I have been with Basile & Testa since April 2006. I graduated from Cumberland County College in May 2006 with an Associate of Science Degree in Paralegal Studies. My responsibilities include dealing with insurance companies, obtaining medical records and doctor's reports and evaluating the client's injuries. As the case progresses, I am responsible for filing the necessary court documents and monitoring deadlines.

One of the nicest aspects of my job is getting to know our clients and being able to help guide them through what is often a very stressful and time-consuming situation.

A paralegal is essential to an attorney engaged in a busy law practice regardless of the area of law being practiced. They are more critical in the area of litigation, whether civil or criminal. This is especially so due to the amount of time an attorney handling litigation is out of the office for court appearances or depositions. The paralegal is always available to the clients, insurance adjusters or medical offices involved in any particular case and to the court personnel for scheduling purposes. I find that our paralegal staff consistently provides a valuable service to our firm and clients. They not only make the attorneys' jobs easier but also make the clients' experience throughout the sometimes stressful litigation process more pleasant.

Basile & Testa, P. A.

Counselors at Law

424 Landis Avenue,
Vineland, New Jersey 08360

Phone: 856.691.2300 - Fax: 856.691.5655

www.basiletesta.com

e-mail: info@basiletesta.com

MICHAEL L. TESTA
CERTIFIED CIVIL TRIAL ATTORNEY
CERTIFIED CRIMINAL TRIAL ATTORNEY
TODD W. HECK, LL.M.
MASTERS DEGREE IN TAXATION
MEMBER NJ, NY AND PA BAR
RENEE E. SCROCCA



MICHAEL L. TESTA, JR., LL.M.
MASTERS DEGREE IN TRIAL ADVOCACY
ROBERT J. CASELLA
JUSTIN R. WHITE
MEMBER NJ AND PA BAR
SHARON A. FERRUCCI

FRANK G. BASILE
(1963-2005)

FRANK J. TESTA
(1940-2001)

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