



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/ROBERT BRAUNFELD

Attorneys Meg Becker, of Staten Island Legal Services; Sheila McGinn and Nancy Goldhill, project director of Legal Services, are involved with Staten Island Civil Legal Advice and Resource Office.

Deep in debt? Get free legal help

Joint venture offers a helping hand to Islanders facing collection lawsuits

By **STEPHANIE SLEPIAN**
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Staten Islanders facing debt collection lawsuits have a new defense: Free legal advice.

Those who can't afford an attorney can tap into the Staten Island Civil Legal Advice and Resource Office (CLARO), a joint effort be-

tween the Richmond County Bar Association, the Staten Island Women's Bar Association and Wagner College.

CLARO will be open on Thursdays from 5 to 7 p.m. in Room 300 of Richmond County Supreme Court, beginning Jan. 20.

"Facing a debt collection lawsuit can be overwhelming," said Patricia Anne Taylor, president of the Staten Island Women's Bar Association.

"Often debtors first learn

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of a lawsuit after creditors have taken other action such as garnishing wages or freezing bank accounts in order to secure a debt. CLARO will provide critical legal assistance to unrepresented debtors."

Last year, creditors in Richmond County filed 15,269 consumer credit cases in New York Civil Court, according to the New York State Unified Court System.

Only 1 percent of the defendants had attorneys representing them.

A three-hour training program for volunteer attorneys and students will take place Wednesday from 6 to 9 p.m. in the Central Jury Room of 126 Stuyvesant Pl.

To register for the training program, visit <http://law.fordham.edu/Statenisland-clarotraining1-12-11>.