


AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION 

# Volunteer Legal Project



## **The Project**

The American Bar Association's Volunteer Legal Project ("VLP") was created in 1986 to assist the ABA's Chicago lawyer staff in fulfilling their professional obligation to perform pro bono service. Over the years, lawyers have provided legal services to numerous indigent clients in matters involving bankruptcy, divorce, custody, adoptions, guardianships, public benefits, wills and other matters.

## **What Is the VLP?**

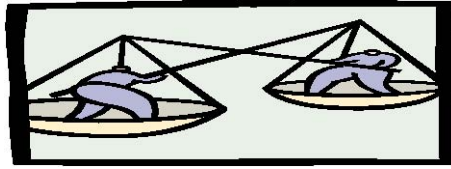
The VLP is housed at the [ABA Center for Pro Bono](#) and staffed by the VLP Coordinator. The VLP offers Association lawyers in the Chicago office support and encouragement in providing volunteer legal services to indigent clients by:

- Acting as a clearinghouse of information regarding volunteer opportunities with several Chicago-area legal services programs.
- Identifying programs that provide training, malpractice insurance, stationery, office space for client meetings, and other crucial substantive and practical support. Providing information and answering questions about the Association's Staff Pro Bono Policy.
- Providing informational e-mails about pro bono trainings and volunteer opportunities.
- Surveying the ABA Chicago lawyer staff about pro bono participation.
- Working with area pro bono programs to provide on-site information sessions and training for ABA lawyers.

## **ABA Staff Pro Bono Policy**

- ▶ Up to 50 hours per year of qualifying pro bono activity may be performed during working hours.
- ▶ Volunteers must schedule qualifying pro bono activities with the consent of their supervisors
- ▶ Reasonable costs for transportation to clients' residences or court may be reimbursable.
- ▶ Reasonable use of copying, paper and telephones is permitted. Under no circumstances should ABA letterhead be used.

**Volunteer Opportunities: The following organizations offer pro bono volunteer opportunities:**



***Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services (CARPLS)***

CARPLS provides telephone hotline advice and referral in civil matters. The program ties together every major legal aid agency, law school clinic and pro bono agency operating in Cook County. Each program is linked via a Centrex telephone system.

Volunteer lawyers assist clients on the telephone through brief advice and referrals two Tuesday evenings per month. CARPLS provides training to volunteers periodically throughout the year. Additional volunteer opportunities are available for attorneys not licensed in Illinois. For more information, visit <http://www.carpls.org/>.

***Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAFMC)***

For over 30 years the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF) has been providing free legal aid to hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable women, men, and children in Cook County. LAF provides advice and representation to individuals; works with community groups on community problems; and provides community legal education and self-help materials.

LAFMC offers a variety of volunteer opportunities, including the intake assistance project, the Children's SSI Termination Project, the Food Stamp & Medical Assistance Advocacy Pro Bono Project, the Foreclosure Defense Project, the Volunteer Ombudsman Project, and the North Shore Senior Center Legal Clinic. LAFMC provides training, support and supervision for all volunteers. For more information, visit [www.lafchicago.org](http://www.lafchicago.org).

***Midwest Immigrant & Human Rights Center (MIHRC)***

MIHRC provides immigration assistance, deportation defense and asylum representation for low-income immigrants. MIHRC periodically offers training opportunities, and will provide mentoring and other resources to volunteers.

For information on MIHRC or to volunteer as a pro bono attorney, call 312-660-1370.

### ***Chicago Legal Clinic***

The Clinic handles minor and disabled adult guardianships, wills, living wills, adoptions, bankruptcy, landlord/tenant, housing, and uncontested divorces. Lawyers can accept cases in their areas of interest. Through the Pro Bono Program, low-income clients with meritorious civil legal problems are matched with private attorneys willing to represent them on a voluntary basis.

Volunteer opportunities are also available for lawyers not licensed in Illinois to assist with interviews, drafting, filing and other tasks. For more information, visit [www.clclaw.org](http://www.clclaw.org).

### ***Chicago Volunteer Legal Services (CVLS)***

Since 1964, CVLS volunteers have served nearly 300,000 clients with their everyday legal matters. CVLS provides clients with legal assistance in matters such as adoption, child support, powers of attorney, and consumer contracts. Volunteers can work through one of CVLS' clinics or through the panel referral program. Volunteers also can choose to speak at Community workshops.

For more information about CVLS, visit <http://www.cvl.org>.

### ***Other Opportunities***

For those of you who have a special interest that is not covered by one of the above programs, please feel free to call the VLP coordinator, Adrienne Packard, at (312) 988-5775 for information about projects in your special interest area.

#### Frequently Asked Questions



*What about professional liability insurance?*

The ABA does not provide lawyers with malpractice insurance, so it is critical that you volunteer with a pro bono program that provides malpractice insurance to its volunteers. Most organizations will publicize it as support provided to volunteers. If you are unsure, check with the organization.

*I am a lawyer but not licensed in Illinois – how can I volunteer?*

Several of the organizations above offer volunteer opportunities for attorneys not licensed in Illinois. Attorneys not licensed in Illinois may work on federal cases, volunteer to provide training, perform research, or handle administrative matters in federal court or government agencies.

*I'm not sure I feel comfortable advising a client – can I get training before volunteering?*

Various training sessions are available to prepare you if you are unfamiliar with the legal issues faced by the organization's clients. Additionally, many organizations offer mentoring or staff support to volunteers.

*Who pays costs?*

Most clients who are referred by a legal services provider will be eligible for waiver of court filing and service costs. In such cases, the organization should be able to assist with filing the necessary paperwork with the court. Expenses incidental to representation, other than those expressly provided for, will not be covered by the ABA.

### **Training Opportunities**

The organizations listed above offer training opportunities to volunteer lawyers on a periodic basis; the VLP will advertise these to ABA attorneys via e-mail. Other training opportunities may be offered at the ABA if there exists sufficient interest.

Additionally, referring organizations may provide manuals, sample pleadings and blank court forms, as well as offer mentors on a variety of substantive issues.

### **ABA MR 6.1: Voluntary Pro Bono Public Service**

Every lawyer has a professional responsibility to provide legal services to those unable to pay. A lawyer should aspire to render at least (50) hours of pro bono publico legal services per year. In fulfilling this responsibility, the lawyer should:

(a) provide a substantial majority of the (50) hours of legal services without fee or expectation of fee to:

- (1) persons of limited means or
- (2) charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters which are designed primarily to address the needs of persons of limited means; and

(b) provide any additional services through:

- (1) delivery of legal services at no fee or substantially reduced fee to individuals, groups or organizations seeking to secure or protect civil rights, civil liberties or public rights, or charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters in furtherance of their organizational purposes, where the payment of standard legal fees would significantly deplete the organization's economic resources or would be otherwise inappropriate;
- (2) delivery of legal services at a substantially reduced fee to persons of limited means; or
- (3) participation in activities for improving the law, the legal system or the legal profession.

In addition, a lawyer should voluntarily contribute financial support to organizations that provide legal services to persons of limited means.

**For more information, contact:  
Adrienne Packard at ext. 5775 or e-mail [adrienne.packard@americanbar.org](mailto:adrienne.packard@americanbar.org)**

