

# Pro Bono Opportunities Are Endless

By Amy Lin Meyerson



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I am honored and excited to chair the CBA's Pro Bono Committee that "strives to promote the public interest through the advancement of justice and the protection of liberty," and more specifically, "facilitate the delivery of competent legal services to the public particularly those in greatest need."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout my 25+ year career as an attorney, I have always made time to engage in pro bono work. Even when I opened my solo law practice, I continued to diligently advocate for my pro bono clients, because I feel that as attorneys we have an obligation to provide access to justice for those in need of legal services.

Rule 6.1 of the Connecticut Rules of Professional Conduct supports the principle that all attorneys should provide pro bono services:

A lawyer should render public interest legal service. A lawyer may discharge this responsibility by providing professional services at no fee or a reduced fee to persons of limited means or to public service or charitable groups or organizations, by service in activities for improving the law, the legal system or the legal profession, and by financial support

for organizations that provide legal services to persons of limited means.<sup>2</sup>

Chaired by UConn School of Law Dean Timothy Fisher and CBA Past President William H. Clendenen, Jr. (2015–2016), the Task Force to Improve Access to Legal Counsel in Civil Matters summarized the human consequences of unmet legal needs in civil matters as follows:

When parties in civil matters lack counsel, profound human needs can be put at risk: safety and bodily integrity for survivors of domestic violence; parent/child relationships in family matters; shelter and security in eviction and foreclosure cases; a decent and safe livelihood in employment and labor matters; health and wellness in cases seeking access to healthcare; the ability to learn and grow when access to education is implicated; access to subsistence income and related governmental benefits; and so on. For individuals facing deportation in immigration matters, *all* of these fundamental human needs may be jeopardized without a lawyer.<sup>3</sup>

Working with Connecticut's legal service organizations and the Connecticut Judicial Branch, the Connecticut Bar Association investigates, implements, and provides opportunities for attorneys to render public interest and pro bono legal services.

Pro bono cases provide a way to develop a new practice area. For example, this past April, the US District Court for the District of Connecticut, the Federal Bar Council, and the Connecticut Bar Association joined together to present "Pro Bono Trials: Tips and Pointers from the Bench and Bar," a free program for attorneys interested in federal litigation. Attendees received insight from members of the federal judiciary and gained useful skills and tips for pro bono trials from skilled colleagues, including mock trial presentations before a federal judge, opening and closing statements, direct examination, cross-examination, and evidence issues. Also included was an overview of the US District Court's screening process for pro se cases and prisoner litigation. Each participant agreed to take on a pro bono matter in the District of Connecticut within the next 12 months and received 6.0 CLE credit hours.

**"Lawyers have a license to practice law, a monopoly on certain services. But for that privilege and status, lawyers have an obligation to provide legal services to those without the wherewithal to pay, to respond to needs outside themselves, to help repair tears in their communities."**

— U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (March 2014)

If you have taken a break from your law practice and are looking to get your foot back into the door, assisting with pro bono matters can help to ease the transition back into the legal profession.

Leaving the practice of law? Kick-off your second season of service through pro bono! Lawyers leaving the active practice of law who have a passion to serve their communities will find opportunities to do so by sharing their skills, energy, and expertise through pro bono legal work for those in need.

Whether you are embarking upon your second season of service, interested in gaining experience in another practice area, looking to break back into the legal profession after some time off, or searching for ways to help ensure access to justice, pro bono cases can provide you with the opportunities you seek.

The Honorable William H. Bright, past chair of the Pro Bono Committee of the Connecticut Judicial Branch, once said about pro bono: “Our justice system only works for all of us when it works for the most vulnerable of our society.”

In that same spirit, join us and the Connecticut Judicial Branch as we work to achieve access to the legal system and justice for everyone. If you know of any individual or organization in need of pro bono legal services, let us know and together we can work to get them the assistance they need. ■



*Amy Lin Meyerson is the 2019–2020 president-elect of the Connecticut Bar Association and chair of the CBA’s Pro Bono Committee. She is a sole practitioner in Weston, practicing business and general corporate law.*

#### NOTES

1. *Constitution of the CBA*, Part. II
2. Conn. R. Prof'l. Cond. 6.1
3. Page 7, Report of the Task Force to Improve Access to Legal Counsel in Civil Matters, Dec. 15, 2016 [https://cdn.ymaws.com/members.ctbar.org/resource/resmgr/Civil\\_Gideon\\_Task\\_Force/Final\\_Report.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/members.ctbar.org/resource/resmgr/Civil_Gideon_Task_Force/Final_Report.pdf).

## SOME OF THE PRO BONO ORGANIZATIONS SERVING CONNECTICUT INCLUDE:

- **Center for Children’s Advocacy** (cca-ct.org)
- **Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants** (cirict.org)
- **Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.** (ctlegal.org)
- **Connecticut Fair Housing Center** (ctfairhousing.org)
- **Connecticut Veterans Legal Center** (ctveteranslegal.org)
- **Disability Rights Connecticut** (disrightsct.org)
- **Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.** (ghla.org)
- **H.E.L.P. Project Hartford** (homelesslegalprotection.com)
- **The Connecticut Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, Inc.** (ctappleseed.org)
- **Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) Legal Services Department** (irisct.org)
- **Lawyers for Children America** (lawyersforchildrenamerica.org)
- **Lawyers Without Borders, Inc.** (lwob.org)
- **University of Connecticut School of Law Tax Clinic** (law.uconn.edu/academics/clinics-experiential-learning/tax-clinic)
- **New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc.** (nhlegal.org)
- **Pro Bono Partnership** (probonopartner.org)
- **Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut** (slsct.org)
  - **Call4law** — a telephonic legal advice hotline for pre-screened low-income individuals facing consumer debt actions.
  - **Security Deposit Clinic** — a program that provides in-person document drafting to pro se litigants seeking to get back security deposits.
  - **Family Law Clinic** — a program that allows individuals to speak to a pro bono attorney about the divorce process and get help drafting the legal documents and fee waivers they need.
  - **Limited Scope Representation Program** — a program that provides brief or in-depth legal assistance in all areas of poverty law to eligible low-income clients.
- **Truancy Intervention Project** (ctbarfdn.org/truancy-intervention)
- **Victim Rights Center of CT** (endsexualviolencect.org/vrcct)

Visit [CTProBono.org](http://CTProBono.org) for more information on opportunities for attorneys and paralegals interested in volunteering their time to provide legal representation for low-income clients who are screened by a legal services agency and deemed eligible for pro bono services for their civil cases.

## UPCOMING PRO BONO EVENTS

- 10/22:  
Pro Bono Clinic (New Britain)
- 10/24:  
Pro Bono Clinic (Bridgeport)
- 10/20–10/26:  
National Pro Bono Week

Many thanks to those of you who are providing pro bono services, including our 2019 Anthony V. DeMayo Pro Bono Award recipients: Rebecca L. Ciota, Jennifer L. Hluska, Brittany A. Killian, Jane I. Milas, and Stephanie B. Nickse, who were honored at this year’s Celebrate with the Stars. If you have an outstanding pro bono experience to share, please send it to [editor@ctbar.org](mailto:editor@ctbar.org).