

Lawyers in Libraries:

CT Lawyer interviewed Kyle LaBuff, a 2019-2021 CBA Presidential Fellow and Deputy Assistant State's Attorney Division of Criminal Justice in Rocky Hill, who began the Lawyers in Libraries pro bono program. Read on to learn more about the program, its inception, and how you can get involved.

CT Lawyer: Why did you want to start the Lawyers in Libraries program?



Kyle LaBuff

Kyle LaBuff: There is a need in our state for those who cannot afford an attorney, yet are challenged with crippling legal issues. We have a tremendous wave of evictions and immigration challenges. This program is designed to offer those in need hope by actually *meeting* an attorney face-to-face. For example, we meet with many senior citizens who believe they have a legal issue and do not feel comfortable using an online platform.

They are more at ease speaking to an attorney in person and this allows clients to come in and show us written documentation that is a part of their case which they may not be able to upload or translate with an online platform.

CL: What is your goal for the program?

KL: The goal is to be one avenue for those in need to utilize in these trying times. In addition to providing legal assistance, it also allows attorneys who were just sworn in to gain experience in areas where they studied in law school and to obtain client management skills, including, where appropriate, to tell a client that they do *not* have a case. A final goal of the program is to be in every county of the state. This allows those in need easy access to the program.

CL: How does the program work?

KL: Participating libraries will provide a room or rooms for clients to meet with volunteering attorneys. The clients will need to call ahead to the library to schedule an appointment, as these clinics are only once per month, for around a two-hour duration. When they call to schedule the appointment, they will tell the library what kind of legal issue they have, such as immigration, family, contract, etc.

Once they check in, they will sign a release form and then meet with the volunteering attorneys. The clients are allocated 20 minutes to speak to the attorneys and show them any documentation relative to their case. The attorney will then provide legal advice.

CL: How can a member get involved? What is the time commitment for volunteers?

KL: A member of the CBA can certainly reach out to me or President-elect Dan Horgan. We will place the volunteer at a library that is convenient for them. The time commitment is minimal—as the program is now, each library will have one clinic a month which will run from around 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

CL: How did you select the cities you included? How will you select additional cities?

KL: Stamford and New London were cities that were able to use their physical structure in a way that did not violate COVID-19 restrictions. The cities were selected based on population, need, and location in the state so that this resource can be accessible no matter where one lives in Connecticut. Norwich just opened in September, and I am hoping Danbury and Torrington will open up in the fall. We will be hopefully opening up at Middletown soon too.

CL: How are volunteers paired with program participants?

KL: Volunteers are assigned to the library that is closest to them. Once assigned to the library, the volunteers can see the list of clients in advance, so they can determine if there is a potential conflict of interest. If there is a conflict of interest, then the client can be passed to another volunteer attorney. So far, we have multiple volunteer attorneys at each clinic, so this has not been an issue.

CL: What is your vision of the future of the program?

KL: Twofold: First, to have this program in all of the major cities in Connecticut and in every county. This way, no matter where one lives, they can easily travel to a clinic. Secondly, to have the volunteer attorneys have the knowledge of *other* pro bono organizations where, if the client needs more help than this program can provide, we can refer the client to an organization built to represent the client from start to finish. For example, if someone has an eviction case, we can send them to Statewide Legal Services so they can quickly obtain the help they need. Since Lawyers in Libraries is new, it will certainly grow and could change its function as time develops.

Attorneys who wish to provide pro bono services through the Lawyers in Libraries program should e-mail probonoclinic@ctbar.org. ■

Volunteer Today!

