

# Pro Bono for Everyone

By MARGARET I. CASTINADO

**I**t has been my great honor to serve as co-chair of the CBA's Pro Bono Committee along with my co-chair, Dan Brody. I am overwhelmingly proud of the work the CBA's Pro Bono Committee, in collaboration with Connecticut's legal service organizations, law schools and most importantly, our dedicated volunteer attorneys, has accomplished over the years towards narrowing the access to justice gap. This task remains critical as many individuals with low- or mid-level income, or who face other obstacles, do not have a meaningful opportunity to access lawyers, courts, or justice to resolve important legal issues.

Having worked for the Office of the Public Defender for the last 26 years, I am keenly aware of the need to serve our marginalized populations. Growing up in a poor household, my father taught me very early in life that despite where you live, or what you don't have, there is always something to give. I have dedicated my life to giving back and am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

Our recent Free Legal Advice Clinic, held January 24–25, was one of our most successful to date. This program is a convenient way to help members of our communities by allowing volunteer attorneys to meet remotely one-on-one with clients to answer civil legal questions. At this event, 30 volunteer attorneys met with 57 clients over Zoom meetings. Volunteer law students and paralegals assisted as well with intake interviews.

The CBA also administers CT Free Legal Answers, a national ABA program with about 41 states participating, where Connecticut attorneys can answer questions about Connecticut law. Recently, Connecticut attorneys Ron Japha, Megan Maynard, and Vivian Moreno-Zelinka were selected by the ABA as ABA Free Legal Answers 2022 Pro Bono Leaders for their participation in CT Free Legal Answers—congratulations to all! Volunteers can answer questions online anytime or at special events, such as an upcoming Spring 2023 program with UConn School of Law. Additionally, the CBA's Young Lawyer Section is

sued a challenge to its members, which led to an increase of ten new volunteer attorneys for this program in November and December. By comparison, in 2021, we averaged one new attorney per month.

The Lawyers in Libraries program now offers monthly events in nine libraries. Several additional libraries want us to hold a program in their location but have been delayed due to a lack of volunteers. In this program, volunteer attorneys provide legal advice to members of the public at local libraries during a two-hour period.



Image credit: Irina\_Strelnikova/Stock/GettyImage Plus

In our Pro Bono Connect program, volunteers pledge to take at least one direct representation case each year for a client with low or no income. All volunteers receive complimentary on-demand training. In our Bankruptcy Pro Bono Program, operational for over a year, volunteers with bankruptcy experience represent income-eligible clients in Chapter 7 cases.

The Pro Bono Committee continues to investigate, implement, and expand programs that assist in addressing issues that implicate the advancement of justice and facilitate ways to provide competent legal services. In 2022, then CBA President Cecil J. Thomas led efforts to create two new committees to further enhance the access to justice efforts: a Legal Aid and Public Defense Committee and a Limited Scope Representation Committee. The Pro Bono Committee has begun new programming as well.

In collaboration with Quinnipiac University School of Law and the CT Bar Foundation, the Pro Bono Committee is supporting the new CT Afghan Asylum Project. This program provides mentors to volunteers who would help refugees with the asylum process. Preliminary discussions have begun to collaborate with existing pardons and expungements projects to facilitate sharing information, volunteer solicitation, and project expansions statewide.

But our success in these efforts depends on you! Despite the success of our programming and the dedication of our volunteer attorneys, the need remains great. Volunteer for one of our great programs and change the trajectory of a person's life forever. To volunteer for our pro bono programs, go to [ctbar.org/ProBono.I](http://ctbar.org/ProBono.I) will end with this quote that has inspired me: "Helping one person might not change the world, but it could change the world for one person." ■

*Margaret I. Castinado is the CBA president-elect and co-chair of the Pro Bono Committee. She is a senior assistant public defender at the Office of the Public Defender in New Haven and has defended thousands of clients with criminal matters since 1999.*



## CBA Free Legal Advice Clinic: Volunteers Needed

Tuesday, April 25, 2023  
10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 26, 2023  
10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

If you have 30 minutes free, you can volunteer. Volunteer attorneys will answer legal questions in their area of practice during a 30-minute remote session with a client.

### Volunteers are needed in the following areas:

- Fraudulent Business/Debt Collection
- Employee Rights/Unemployment
- Immigration Law
- Landlord/Tenant
- Family Law
- Tax Law
- Bankruptcy
- Pardons
- Wills and Estates
- Torts

Volunteer opportunities are available for paralegals and law students as well. Visit [ctbar.org/FreeLegalAdviceClinics](http://ctbar.org/FreeLegalAdviceClinics) to learn more and register.

