

Sixteen Years of Celebrating Pro Bono

PRO BONO WORK CAN INVOLVE some of the most meaningful work of a lawyer's career. It can also make a significant difference for an individual facing a demanding situation. To thank those who give their time and to draw attention to the need for pro bono participation, the CBA and other organizations across America participate in the National Celebration of Pro Bono every October. The ABA's Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service started the National Celebration of Pro Bono in 2009 due to harsh economic times and the need for an unprecedented legal response to meet the moment.¹ That year, approximately 600 pro bono events were held nationally as part of the celebration.²

Every year since 2009, the National Celebration of Pro Bono has grown and reached more people. This year will mark the sixteenth annual National Celebration of Pro Bono. The 2024 celebration will reach its peak from October 20–26, with pro bono events throughout the month. In 2024, there will be an estimated 2,000 pro bono events around the country in connection with the National Celebration of Pro Bono. That will make it the

largest National Celebration of Pro Bono to date.³

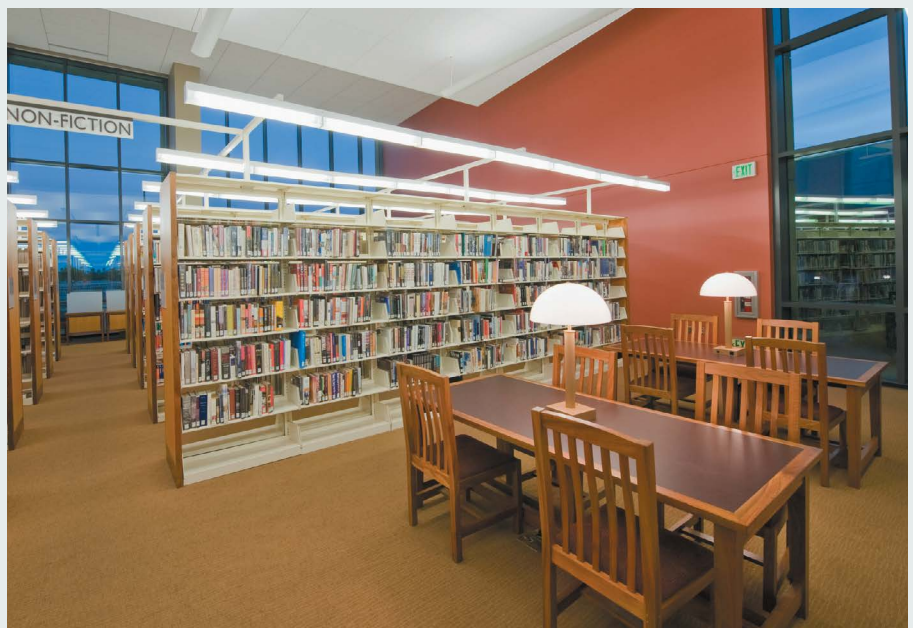
Here in Connecticut, the CBA provides pro bono opportunities throughout the year and is proud to participate every October in the National Celebration of Pro Bono. This year's CBA celebration includes numerous pro bono events to meet the growing need for pro bono services.

The CBA kicks off its October focus on pro bono by participating in Small Claims Volunteer Attorney Program events. On October 8 and October 10, volunteers from the CBA and through the Connecticut Judicial Branch will spend two hours helping self-represented individuals with small claims matters. The October 8 event is from 2:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m. in Hartford, and the October 10 event is from 2:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m. in New Haven.

Later that same day, the celebration will continue with a unique and fun pro bono event. The annual CBA Young Lawyers Section Golf and Pro Bono Fair Golf Event will be on October 10 in Cromwell. At that pro bono event, members of the Young Lawyers Section interested in doing pro bono work have a chance to meet and connect with legal aid organizations that rely on pro bono volun-

A CLOSER LOOK AT LAWYERS IN LIBRARIES

In 2020, the pandemic had affected every aspect of society. As Connecticut residents faced unprecedented challenges, the demand for pro bono services rose accordingly. Many of the offices where individuals could ordinarily seek help or guidance were closed or facing reduced staffing. But, many local libraries stayed open and continued to serve the public. Kyle LaBuff, a CBA Pro Bono Committee member, saw a chance to make a meaningful difference, and he started the CBA Lawyers in Libraries Program. Volunteer attorneys attended a two-hour event at a local library where they met with members of the public to provide brief advice about civil legal issues. The program was a hit and received glowing feedback. Local residents appreciated being able to get legal help at a location convenient for them without having to travel across the state. More and more libraries wanted to host Lawyers in Libraries events.



Now, in its fifth year, Lawyers in Libraries has expanded to hold monthly events at ten libraries around the state. But still, even this rapid growth has not been enough to meet demand. The CBA

regularly hears from local libraries that would like to be part of the program. For example, plans are in the works to expand to add a Hartford location. The sticking point, though, is the number

Image credit: iPGGutenbergUKLtd/Getty Images

teers to accomplish their missions. And, for added enjoyability, attendees have the option to enjoy a round of golf too. Attendees often find a pro bono opportunity that is a good fit for them based on their interests, experience, and availability.

Throughout the National Celebration of Pro Bono month, the CBA will hold a record nine Lawyers in Libraries events. During Lawyers in Libraries events, volunteer attorneys make themselves available at libraries throughout the state to meet with Connecticut residents and provide short legal advice and guidance about civil law matters.⁴

A culminating event during the National Celebration of Pro Bono is the CBA's Free Legal Advice Clinic. On Oct. 22 and 23, members of the public with civil law questions can register to meet with a volunteer attorney, for free, on Zoom for 30 minutes to receive legal guidance and advice. The Free Legal Advice Clinic held during the National Celebration of Pro Bono is typically the largest of the year. The CBA anticipates that over 100 Connecticut residents will register for the two-day clinic.

The CBA will close out the sixteenth Celebration of Pro Bono with a Free Legal Answers Comes to Campus event at the University of Connecticut School of Law on November 1. At that event, volunteer attorneys from the CBA will mentor and guide law students as they engage in pro bono work. Through this unique partnership, law students and attorneys collaborate to answer civil legal questions posted on the Free

Legal Answers website by Connecticut residents with low or no income.

The CBA is proud of its long tradition of promoting pro bono services. Lawyers interested in volunteering at any of the CBA's National Celebration of Pro Bono events can visit ctbar.org/volunteer or email Jenn Shukla, CBA Director of Access to Justice Initiatives, at jshukla@ctbar.org.

In the words of Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the legal profession "must devote itself first to the community it is responsible to serve. I can imagine no greater duty than fulfilling this obligation. And I can imagine no greater pleasure." (78 Or. L. Rev. 385, 391 (1999)). ■

NOTES

- 1 ABA Center for Pro Bono's Celebrate Pro Bono webpage, available at www.americanbar.org/groups/center-pro-bono/celebrate-pro-bono/ (last viewed 9/17/24).
- 2 ABA Center for Pro Bono's Celebrate Pro Bono webpage, available at www.americanbar.org/groups/center-pro-bono/celebrate-pro-bono/ (last viewed 9/17/24).
- 3 ABA Center for Pro Bono's 2024 List of Pro Bono Celebration Events, available at www.americanbar.org/groups/center-pro-bono/celebrate-pro-bono/events.
- 4 See the insert "A Closer Look" to learn more about Lawyers in Libraries.
- 5 Members of the public looking to receive legal assistance at these events must register with a participating library in advance.

of volunteers. In order to bring Lawyers in Libraries to more people around the state, the CBA needs additional attorney volunteers. Volunteers in the program typically attend a single two-hour Lawyers in Libraries event at a library convenient for them once every month or two. Attorneys can volunteer alongside other friends and colleagues. Volunteering at a Lawyers in Library event can be a great team-building opportunity.

As part of the National Celebration of Pro Bono in October, the CBA has committed to hosting an ambitious nine Lawyers in Libraries events in a single month. To accomplish this feat, the CBA will need additional attorney volunteers. At Lawyers in Libraries events, the CBA sees a wide variety of civil legal questions. During a typical event, some residents want to know if they have a strong case related to a personal injury they got; others want to better understand civil procedure; a

few attendees hope to have a contract or document reviewed or explained. Mostly, attendees are looking to be heard and for some general information about the legal system or for someone to translate the dreaded so-called "legalese" to plain simple language. Volunteer attorneys do not need to have any specific experience or practice in a specific area of law, just a genuine desire to help others. Interested attorneys are invited to email jshukla@ctbar.org.⁵

In connection with the National Celebration of Pro Bono, in October, the CBA will be hosting the nine events below:

Berlin-Peck Memorial Library (Berlin)

Monday, October 28
5:30-7:30 p.m.

Newfield Library (Bridgeport)

Wednesday, October 9
6:00-8:00 p.m.

North Branch Library (Bridgeport)

Thursday, October 10
6:00-8:00 p.m.

Danbury Library (Danbury)

Thursday, October 24
5:30-7:30 p.m.

Russell Library (Middletown)

Tuesday, October 15
4:00-6:00 p.m.

New Britain Public Library (New Britain)

Wednesday, October 16
5:30-7:30 p.m.

Public Library of New London (New London)

Thursday, October 24
4:00-6:00 p.m.

Otis Library (Norwich)

Wednesday, October 30
4:00-6:00 p.m.

Ferguson Library (Stamford)

Thursday, October 31
(Note: Date may change due to Halloween)
6:00-8:00 p.m.