



2015 LAWO PRO BONO OPPORTUNITIES

General Background

The Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Program was created by Legal Aid of Western Ohio (LAWO) and Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE) in November 2006 to improve our ability to meet the ever growing and diverse needs of our client communities by involving private attorneys in providing access to justice for our clients. The PAI Unit has a director and two part-time paralegals working under the direct supervision of LAWO's Executive Director. It covers 25 of the 32 counties in LAWO's service area. LAWO also provides funding for the Volunteer Lawyer's Project (VLP) in Dayton, which covers six counties, and the Toledo Bar Association (TBA) Pro Bono Program, which covers Toledo.

Opportunities for Pro Bono Legal Work

LAWO, ABLE, and partner agencies VLP and TBA administer several projects to help meet the demands for civil legal assistance through pro bono participation. These include:

- Direct pro bono referrals
- Batch pro bono clinics
- Reduced fee (PAI) referrals in rural counties
- Brief advice clinics
- Pro se legal clinics
- Community Legal Education
- Co-counseling arrangements
- Prisoner Reentry Legal Clinics and Warrant Hearings
- Corporate Counsel brief advice phone appointments with clients

Support for Pro Bono Attorneys

The PAI Program unit and local pro bono programs recruit volunteer attorneys through outreach to local bar associations and direct contact. Pro bono attorneys receive support as incentive to participate and make their participation as efficient and rewarding as possible. Volunteer attorneys receive:

- Malpractice insurance at no cost for the duration of the client's case
- Sample pleadings and forms to be used as models
- Reimbursement of extraordinary litigation expenses and out-of-pocket expenses

- Free Continuing Legal Education
- Case maintenance and follow-up for the duration of the case
- Yearly tracking of volunteer attorneys' pro bono hours
- Subject matter support by in-house attorneys, e.g., a volunteer attorney handling a foreclosure case will have access to an ABLE or LAWO attorney for consultations

Opportunities to Participate in Innovative Projects

The PAI project leverages its pro bono capacity by partnering with county bar associations and corporate law departments whenever possible.

LiveChat Project: Pro Bono attorneys assist LAWO in providing “chat-based” counsel and advice to eligible low-income clients via LivePerson technology. The pro bono LiveChat project offers a unique opportunity for attorneys to expand their potential for volunteer work without a large time commitment. This new project leverages existing online communication tools and matches low income persons with pro bono attorneys based on availability and expertise. The LiveChat project provides pro bono attorneys practicing in rural counties, a brief time-limited volunteer opportunity with flexible time options.

Legal Aid Line Pro Bono Clinics: Pro bono attorneys from Marathon Petroleum’s legal department and several affinity groups provide brief counsel and advice via pre-scheduled phone appointments with clients from across LAWO’s 32 county service area through LAWO/ABLE’s Legal Aid Line. Groups of 5-15 attorneys and paralegals can provide legal advice followed by referrals and written instructions to as many as 40 clients in an afternoon. Volunteers receive free Continuing Legal Education in areas of poverty law in preparation for the clinics, e.g., housing, consumer debt collection, landlord-tenant, and domestic relations. Attorney teams have commented that they enjoy the team-building aspect of training and working together, making this clinic ideal for an in-house/outside law firm project. Pro bono attorneys have the opportunity to provide counsel and advice from remote locations.

Small Business/Microenterprise Pro Bono Clinics: Transactional and intellectual property attorneys meet with clients who have attended the Assets Toledo small business class. Assets Toledo is an organization that assists entrepreneurs to form their business plans and launch new businesses in the Toledo, Ohio area. At the clinics, attorneys provide brief counsel and advice on issues such as forming an LLC or registering a trademark. Attorneys meet with clients for one-half hour sessions and may be referred to the pro bono program for extended representation. Attorneys are matched to clients with questions within their business experience.

The Prisoner Reentry Legal Needs Project links pro bono attorneys and law students with Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc. (LAWO) staff attorneys to work with reentering prisoners inside Northwest Ohio prisons starting at least six months prior to release. The program’s primary purpose is to reduce recidivism among ex-offenders. This six-month head start allows the lawyers and law students participating in the project to proactively identify and solve legal issues that otherwise would prevent successful re-entry. Pro bono attorneys conduct intake interviews in prisons and represent prisoners in video hearings related to outstanding warrants and fines. Attorneys have assisted hundreds of returning citizens.

We also need attorneys and law students to assist with First Wednesdays at One Government Center in Toledo. Volunteers interview potential clients to help determine their legal needs in the areas of housing, child support, public benefits, possible record sealing, driver's license reinstatement, and outstanding warrants and fines – all of which interfere with employability and successful day-to-day living. We will provide interview outlines. We also need assistance at warrant and fine hearings.

ALLEN COUNTY

Bar Association Email Blasts: The Allen County Bar Association's members receive descriptions of available cases and updates to its volunteers by mass email. This system increases efficiencies and allows the PAI program to increase placement in this county. We are working on adding more bar associations to this system.

Batch Clinics: The Allen County Domestic Relations Divorce Clinic in Lima provides clients with a pro bono attorney, selected by Judge Staley. These cases are screened for no issues such as assets, debts, retirement, or custody, etc. LAWO staff prepares all of the documents and assists with filing the action. At the monthly clinic, the clients meet with the pro bono attorney, review, and sign the pleadings and forms. Any minor changes are made by LAWO staff in attendance. LAWO staff copy the pleadings and forms and walk client to the Clerk of Courts to file the new case. The pro bono attorney attends the hearing with the client to finalize the divorce case.

HANCOCK COUNTY

Pro Bono Pro Se Clinics: Answering the needs expressed by local judicial officers, LAWO partnered with the Hancock County Bar Association to spearhead and develop a clinic for pro se divorce filers. Volunteer attorneys work hand in hand with LAWO attorneys to instruct and assist local residents in completing the numerous forms and pleadings required for a divorce or dissolution. Volunteer attorneys and paralegals received a free Continuing Legal Education course prior to providing their pro bono service.

LOGAN AND SHELBY COUNTIES

Virtual Office Clinic: The funding, spearheaded through Judge Walter Rice, federal district judge for the Southern District of Ohio, supports LAWO counsel and advice clinics in the Southern District's rural counties. LAWO staff screen applicants and identify their legal issues before setting appointments with pro bono attorneys via video conferencing during monthly clinics. The applicants anticipate brief counsel and advice only. Attorneys are able to provide ongoing representation at their discretion. LAWO staff attorneys and paralegals will partner with volunteers to minimize case work and travel time.

SHELBY COUNTY

Pro Se Divorce Clinic: Answering the needs expressed by local judicial officers, LAWO partnered with the Shelby County Bar Association to spearhead and develop a clinic for pro se divorce filers. Volunteer attorneys work hand in hand with LAWO attorneys to instruct and assist local residents in completing the numerous forms and pleadings required for a divorce. Volunteer attorneys and paralegals received a free Continuing Legal Education course prior to providing their pro bono service.

MERCER COUNTY

Batch Clinics: The Mercer County Domestic Relations Divorce Clinic in Celina provides clients with a pro bono attorney. These cases have no issues such as assets, debts, retirement, or custody, etc. LAWO staff prepares all of the documents and assists with filing the action. At the monthly clinic, the clients meet with the pro bono attorney, review, and sign the pleadings and forms. Any minor changes are made by LAWO staff in attendance. LAWO staff copy the pleadings and forms and walk client to the Clerk of Courts to file the new case. The pro bono attorney attends the hearing with the client to finalize the divorce case.

For more information regarding participation in one of our Pro Bono opportunities please contact Melissa S. LaRocco, Director of Private Attorney and Law Student Involvement, at 419-930-2479 or by e-mail at mlarocco@lawolaw.org