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## Pro Bono Newsletter

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### Citation

University of Michigan Law School, "Pro Bono Newsletter" (2013). *Newsletters*.  
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# pro bono program NEWSLETTER

by and for Michigan Law students

Fall 2013  
Volume 3, Issue 1



# Michigan Law

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL



## Help Others, Help Yourself

*Earlier this semester Chad Readler, a Jones Day Partner and Michigan Law alumnus, talked with Danny Wells, Pro Bono Board Member and Newsletter Chair, to discuss pro bono work throughout Mr. Readler's career and related topics relevant to Michigan Law students.*

### **How did you get involved with pro bono work early in your career?**

As a junior lawyer, I was interested in appellate litigation. I clerked for an appellate court judge and worked for a lawyer who had a number of high profile appeals. Taking a pro bono case on appeal allowed me to gain a lot of

first-hand experience. I was able to counsel my own client, draft the brief, and argue the case before the appellate court. I did a series of those cases, which was great both because I

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### **take the pledge!**

Michigan Law has a long tradition of serving the public. That's part of our heritage as a public school, and it stretches back to our beginnings in 1859. To celebrate Michigan Law's 150 years of producing lawyers committed to public service, we launched the Pro Bono Pledge in fall 2009. We encourage students to voluntarily commit to performing 50 hours of pro bono service while enrolled at Michigan Law. The Pledge allows students to connect their developing knowledge to the world outside the Law School. In this way, they gain valuable legal skills while helping organizations in our community meet the needs of underrepresented individuals.

# Directory of Student Org-Sponsored Pro Bono Projects

## **ACLU of Michigan – Michigan Law Chapter**

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Michigan Law's chapter of the ACLU links student volunteers with a variety of research and outreach projects related to civil liberties and civil rights.

Generally, all law students are eligible to participate, but training and time commitment requirements vary from project to project. The ACLU's most recent project offering involved voting rights, while previous offerings have dealt with LGBT issues and more.

## **Education Law and Policy Society**

### *Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse*

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This project entails legal research and writing related to civil rights injunctive cases. Students will focus on an area of law of particular interest to them – prison conditions, policing, fair housing, deinstitutionalization, employment discrimination, child welfare, education, etc. They will obtain and code case documents from PACER (the federal judiciary's electronic docketing system), code cases, and write summaries of the cases for publication on the Clearinghouse website.

### *ACLU Right to Read Lawsuit*

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Participating students will assist the ACLU of Michigan in legal research and fact finding for pending litigation regarding special education. research

reports will be completed independently, and deadlines will be flexible.

## **Environmental Law and Policy Program**

### *Environmental Crimes Prosecution Project*

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Participants assist Professor David Uhlmann in conducting the first-ever comprehensive empirical study of environmental criminal prosecutions in the country. Students collect information and develop a database about such prosecutions, facilitating research and analysis about criminal enforcement, including discretionary factors that make environmental violations criminal and geographical disparities in criminal enforcement under environmental laws. Results will be published and shared with Congress, the DOJ, and the EPA. The project requires five hours per week.

## **Family Law Project**

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FLP provides an opportunity for law students to obtain practical legal experience working with survivors of domestic violence. Under the supervision of an attorney, student volunteers assist with all aspects of casework including client interviews, drafting pleadings, and planning case strategy. All law students are eligible to participate; 2Ls and 3Ls are eligible to appear at court

hearings. Volunteers must attend domestic violence training (provided once during the fall semester) and office training (provided several times throughout the year) prior to volunteering on a project.

## **Future Advocates in Training**

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FAIT is a volunteer outreach program that seeks, through the development of mock trial teams: (1) to improve high school students' reading, writing, and critical thinking skills, and (2) to increase law student participation in surrounding communities through the mentorship of youth. The weekly time commitment can be anywhere from two to ten hours. One to two hours of training are required.

## **Human Rights Advocates**

### *Freedom House Pro Bono Project*

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Freedom House is a non-profit organization located in Detroit that helps refugees, primarily from Sub-Saharan Africa, apply for asylum status in the United States and refugee status in Canada. Due to the number of clients Freedom House assists, the organization is in great need for people who are able to provide translations for documents that will be used for clients' asylum applications. Although French language skills are primarily needed, clients periodically require other



languages as well. Time commitment will vary, but students can expect about 1 hour a week, depending on their availability.

#### Human Trafficking Law Project

Efforts to combat human trafficking suffer from a lack of research, data, and analysis. The Human Trafficking Law Project database is the first publicly available database of human trafficking cases within the United States. This project allows students to participate in this first-of-its kind resource, gain legal research skills, and learn about human trafficking. Students must commit five hours per semester.

#### Jewish Family Services – Refugee & Asylum Project

Jewish Family Services is an Ann Arbor nonprofit that provides English language, immigration, resettlement and employment services to immigrants and refugees from around the world. For this project, law students volunteer to complete green card applications for JFS's constituents or plan and present various Know Your Rights presentations designed to educate Lawful Permanent Residents. Volunteer

opportunities are generally on Fridays, and students can participate as many or as few times as they like. No training or foreign language skills are required (although Arabic, in particular, may be helpful in giving presentations).

#### Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project

This project seeks to assist Iraqi refugees living in the Middle East with worthy refugee and resettlement claims. Under the supervision of alumni attorneys, students work in pairs to file legal forms, including requests for reconsideration. Participants must attend training at the beginning of the year. Ten to twenty hours per semester are expected.

#### Legal Alternative Winter Breaks

LAWBreaks offers service-learning experiences for Michigan Law students during spring break. The trips are designed to provide a brief immersion into the human side of a pressing legal or social justice issue. Students will meet and work together with actors on many sides of the relevant issues, contribute to important social justice work, and have a chance to bond with fellow students outside of Hutchins

Hall. This year's trips will be to New Orleans (criminal justice), Tucson (immigration), Detroit (poverty law and economic development), an American Indian reservation (tribal law: precise location TBD), and Belize (human rights, with a focus on women's rights). Applications are due in the fall.

#### **Michigan Immigration and Labor Law Association**

##### Michigan Unemployment Insurance Project

MiUI recruits and trains students to give free legal assistance to unemployed workers seeking UI benefits. Currently, with up to 79 weeks of UI available in Michigan, a denied claim represents a potential \$23,700 in lost income for that individual and his or her family. 1Ls with one semester of law school completed, 2Ls, and 3Ls are eligible, but must attend training. The time commitment is roughly five hours per week, depending on hearings.

##### WCWC Domestic Worker Advocacy

MILLA has partnered with the Washtenaw County Workers' Center (WCWC) to create a bilingual Know Your Labor Rights presentation for immigrant workers (particularly low-wage workers and independent contractors) in the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti area. Topics covered by the presentation include safety and health laws, unemployment insurance and workers' compensation, misclassification of employees, and wage theft. The presentation is still being

written. Students interested in helping with research, drafting the presentation itself, or presenting it to workers are eligible. The time commitment will vary according to the number of presentations available.

#### *Know Your Rights: Latino Immigrant Community*

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The Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (WICIR) and MILLA developed a bilingual English/Spanish PowerPoint presentation and accompanying handout to facilitate informational sessions for local immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented. Law students and community advocates present this information at churches, schools, and other public meeting spaces. Students participate both in giving presentations and helping to arrange presentation opportunities. Spanish speakers are especially desirable. The time commitment varies from semester to semester.

#### *Know Your Rights: Arab Immigrant Community*

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MILLA is partnering with ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) to develop a Know Your Rights presentation geared toward the Arab American community. The format will be similar to our Latino KYR. The project is currently looking for students to help research the relevant law. The time commitment will vary according to the number of presentations available.

#### *Michigan Immigrant Rights Center*

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The MIRC focuses on helping undocumented immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence apply for U-visas. This type of visa is available to immigrants who assist authorities with the reporting and prosecution of crimes. In addition, MIRC works with clients who have claims under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and other immigration issues. Students work on part of the U-visa process, communicate with clients about their cases, and interpret/translate. Students generally commit at least two hours per week at the downtown Ann Arbor location. Spanish fluency preferred, but not required.

#### *U-Visa Pro Bono Attorney Assistance*

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The Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC) focuses on helping undocumented immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence apply for U-visas. This type of visa is available to immigrants who assist authorities with the reporting and prosecution of crimes. In addition, MIRC works with clients who have claims under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and other immigration issues. Students work on part of the U-visa process, communicate with clients about their cases, and interpret/translate. Students generally commit at least two hours per week at the downtown Ann Arbor location.

Spanish fluency preferred, but not required.

#### **Michigan Law Students for Reproductive Justice**

##### *Pregnant and Parenting Teen Guide*

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LSRJ is putting together a legal guide for pregnant and parenting teens in Michigan, to provide teens with information about their rights, their options, and the availability of helpful resources. The guide will be organized into thematic sections of FAQs, such as "Will my medical records stay private even if I'm on my parent's insurance?" and "Do I have a right to stay in school?." For students interested in family law, health law, youth rights, and reproductive justice, this is a great opportunity to learn and do legal research while at Michigan law.

#### **Poverty Law Society**

##### *Mississippi Center for Justice Project*

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MCJ volunteers conduct policy research, help draft legislation, create consumer education materials, and assist with litigation projects on a variety of poverty law and consumer protection topics. Different projects arise each semester and require varying time commitments, up to a few hours per week. Previous projects have dealt with foreclosure prevention and the discriminatory recruitment tactics of for-profit colleges. Volunteers may have the opportunity to visit the MCJ headquarters in Jackson, MS, for

a week of pro bono service over spring break.

### **Public Benefits Advocacy Project**

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PBAP volunteers visit local transitional housing and community centers to assist clients in completing applications for food stamps and other public benefits. Under the supervision of attorneys, volunteers also hold regular office hours at Legal Services of South Central Michigan to help clients navigate the public benefits system, serving as advocates to ensure clients receive the benefits to which they are entitled. Trainings are held each fall.

### **StreetLaw**

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StreetLaw links students with several organizations around the Ann Arbor area, where they provide legal education and more to elementary and high school students, prisoners, the elderly, and sexual assault victims and counselors. Time commitment is flexible, and training requirements (if any) vary from site to site. Current sites include the following:

#### *Ann Arbor Safe House*

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Members work with staff to educate both Safe House staff and high school student volunteers about sexual assault laws and other legal issues they may encounter in their work.

#### *Bryant Community Center*

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Members visit this community center weekly to provide after-school programming for high school students. Members will

lead mock trials and other lessons and games that engage high school students in different aspects of the law.

#### *Green Baxter Community Center*

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Members visit this community center weekly to provide after-school programming for elementary and middle school students. Members spend the first half of each session teaching a law-related lesson, then help the students apply what they've learned through an interactive activity.

**Student org leaders,  
is your project missing  
from our directory?**

*Contact Danny Wells at  
dewells@umich.edu to  
ensure all your projects  
are in our next  
project directory.*

#### *Juvenile Detention Center*

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Members educate teens at the Juvenile Detention Center about various legal issues. Lesson plans are provided to volunteers each week, on topics ranging from the First Amendment, to Criminal Procedure, to Torts.

#### *Parnall Correctional Facility*

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Members visit an all-male correctional facility about an hour away from Ann Arbor to work with the Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative. Members teach lessons on a variety of topics to prisoners who will soon be re-entering society.



Common topics include employment and child support.

#### *University Living*

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Members host one-hour discussion sessions with elderly members of an assisted-living community. Past sessions have included mock law classes and debates on legal issues.

# SPOTLIGHT: Public Benefits Advocacy Project

by Annalyce Shufelt & Veronica Perera

The Public Benefits Advocacy Project (PBAP) has been connecting MLaw students with clients in need for years. It expanded in the last couple of years to meet expanding need: volunteers can now help clients apply for a broad range of public benefits, with a focus on food assistance. PBAP presents an excellent opportunity for law students, and especially 1Ls, to build legal skills while making a difference in the community.

Members of PBAP visit local transitional housing and community centers to assist clients in completing applications for food stamps and other public benefits. Volunteers typically spend a couple hours at a time at sites, and can choose to volunteer weekly or every other week. Under the supervision of three attorneys, PBAP also holds weekly office hours at Legal Services of South Central Michigan to help clients navigate the public benefits system. When issues come up in the application process, as they inevitably do, office-hour volunteers serve as advocates to ensure clients receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Know a pro bono volunteer or project whose efforts deserve the spotlight?

Contact Danny Wells at [dewells@umich.edu](mailto:dewells@umich.edu), and your story could be in the next newsletter!



Volunteers have the opportunity to make a real difference in the surrounding community. In one case out of many, a client visited the PBAP table at the Delonis Center, a homeless shelter in downtown Ann Arbor, looking for help. PBAP volunteers make weekly visits to Delonis during dinnertime, when the Center opens its doors to provide meals to low-income persons from across the city. This particular client had been working part-time as a library assistant and had recently had his minimal hours cut in half, so volunteers helped him apply for food assistance. He did not even have his own phone number to use as contact information, so he had

to use the number of the library where he worked. A few weeks later, volunteers received a note with kind words from the client, ecstatic that he had received his benefits. A few months after that, he came in for a meal at the Delonis Center and made it a point to stop by the PBAP table to tell the students volunteering that day how appreciative he was of all the help he received.

PBAP provides law students with a valuable opportunity to participate in community service, learn about public interest and administrative law, and develop skills such as compassionate client interviewing and effective communication with government agencies. But even more than that, PBAP provides a much-needed service to members of the community.

## **Help Others, Help Yourself**

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gained valuable experience and enhanced my legal skills and because I was able to give back to the community at large. It was experience that I wouldn't have received otherwise, and my clients received needed help.

### **When you started working at Jones Day, what did it take to get involved in a pro bono case?**

The approval process at the firm was pretty easy. I had to have a supervising partner, but I was really responsible for doing the work on the case.

### **How does your firm approach pro bono work today?**

Jones Day has a partner in their Washington, D.C. office that is responsible for overseeing pro bono efforts across the firm. Then, every office has a pro bono coordinator who works with the partner in DC to find quality opportunities where we can make a difference and help people in need. The firm commits a substantial amount of resources to pro bono.

### **Today, how should a young associate approach pro bono work?**

I think you should figure out what you'd like to do, whether it's an issue of some kind or a

specific organization or type of work (like a trial). Once you know that, so long as there isn't a conflict of interest and it's something that qualifies under the larger pro bono umbrella, then you have a lot of flexibility to do what you want.

### **What can a young associate do if they don't have a specific project that they'd like to work on?**

If you don't have a great concept of what you'd like to do yet, there will be people you can talk to at the firm to help you figure that out. The firm does get approached with opportunities, so if you just want to do something but you don't really know what, we have lots of suggestions.

### **What kind of project would a law firm want a student or young associate to be involved with?**

Something you're passionate about, whether it's helping an individual or gaining experience or skills practice. It could be working with a non-profit organization, on an appeal, or on an issue in a foreign country—there is a whole range of different kinds of work available. We want to make sure that associates' pro bono work will be supervised properly, so that it's beneficial

for both the young lawyer and the client. Other than that, there's a lot of flexibility.

### **What are some examples of different pro bono projects you've worked on?**

I'd say ninety percent of the pro bono work that I've done has been in litigation or in an advisory capacity. I've done a number of pro bono appeals, including two clients who were on death row. I also drafted a memorandum for NGOs working in Kenya and Bosnia, advising them on issues that they were confronting for the first time.

**Know an attorney with an interesting pro bono story to share?**

Contact Danny Wells at [dewells@umich.com](mailto:dewells@umich.com), and your interview could be featured here!

Recently, I worked on a petition seeking habeas relief that the U.S. Supreme Court heard. We wanted to show that the defendant was actually innocent of the crime, and that if we could do that, then the one-year statute of limitations for federal habeas petitions shouldn't prevent him from receiving relief. I had the



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opportunity to argue the case before the U.S. Supreme Court, and we won. That case will make a difference for defendants who discover evidence of their innocence but may have waited too long to file their claims. It's also a national rule, so it will apply all around the United States.

**So there are lots of professionally beneficial reasons for young lawyers to do pro bono work, but why are you still doing pro bono work?**

I love the opportunity to help people who wouldn't otherwise receive adequate representation. In trying to make a difference in the legal system, I also get to meet a lot of people that I wouldn't otherwise cross paths with in my ordinary practice. In about a third of my pro bono cases, I get the opportunity to work with a public service organization. The case might originate there, they might write an amicus brief, or we might co-litigate it.

**What is the relationship between pro bono work and public interest organizations?**

Often times public interest organizations are able to identify cases and projects that would benefit from the resources of a large law firm. Both firms and nonprofits play a really critical role. Many public interest organizations have staffing challenges that make it difficult to handle the volume of cases they receive. If a case would benefit from more staffing than a certain organization is able to provide, or if there's an especially important issue, then the organization might partner with pro bono attorneys. ♦

# Top 5 projects that focus on children's issues

**1. Street Law at Green Baxter Community Center: Participants in this pro bono project visit young children in a low-income neighborhood on Ann Arbor's north side once per week to give lessons on law-related topics. No problem if you can't commit to once per week - come as often as you can!**

**2. Foster Youth Know Your Rights trainings: Law students visit groups of foster children at various sites around the state to inform them of their rights under recent Michigan legislation. Students might also have the chance to train social workers and other groups of professionals on foster youth rights (a chance to train the trainers!).**

**3. Future Advocates in Training (FAIT): FAIT participants coach the mock trial team at Ypsilanti High School. The team practices regularly and FAIT needs lots and lots of law students to help out!**

**4. Family Law Project (FLP): FLP volunteers work on a variety of family law cases on behalf of survivors of domestic violence, including custody cases and divorces with minor children.**

**5. Detroit Center for Family Advocacy (CFA): CFA provides legal and social work services to low-income families to prevent the unnecessary placement of children in foster care. Every semester, CFA seeks law student interns to support their efforts.**

# What is the Michigan Law Pro Bono Pledge?

## Introducing: the 2013-14 pro bono board

### **co-presidents**

Mary Soo Anderson  
Dani Krumholz

### **3L advisor**

Megan Sanders

### **events chairs**

Sarah Thompson  
Danielle Angeli

### **communications chairs**

Danica Taylor  
Kelsey VanOverloop

### **awards chair**

Maria Liu

### **student org outreach chairs**

Sean Killeen  
Megan Richardson

### **law firm outreach chair**

Kelly Hagen

### **social media chair**

Emily Suran

### **newsletter chairs**

Danny Wells  
Amy Lishinski

*with pro bono program director, Amy Sankaran*



A voluntary program, the University of Michigan Law School Pro Bono Pledge encourages students to perform 50 hours or more of qualifying pro bono work over their three years in law school. Graduating students who have fulfilled the Pledge will receive a Certificate of Pro Bono Service from the Dean, recognition at an annual pro bono banquet, and acknowledgment during the Honors Convocation.

*If you have not yet taken the pledge and are ready to do so, please visit [law.umich.edu/careers/probono](http://law.umich.edu/careers/probono) or contact Prof. Amy Sankaran at [aharwell@umich.edu](mailto:aharwell@umich.edu) or (734) 764-7787.*

