

Pro Bono Program Frequently Asked Questions

What types of cases does Legal Aid DC refer to pro bono attorneys?

We generally refer cases in eviction defense, child custody, records sealing, Social Security disability benefits appeals, and housing conditions. We occasionally have opportunities outside of our main practice areas. We are open to creating new projects based on our community needs and/or law firm experience.

Does Legal Aid screen cases before referring them to pro bono attorneys?

Yes. Legal Aid screens all our cases before referring them to pro bono attorneys. We conduct full intakes with all potential clients, assess the merits of the case, and determine suitability for pro bono referral.

What kind of resources does Legal Aid offer?

Legal Aid provides detailed manuals, training videos, sample pleadings, and expert mentorship. Each pro bono case is assigned an experienced Legal Aid attorney as an expert mentor who can answer questions, provide sample pleadings, and discuss relevant case law and strategy.

Can I volunteer if I am not an attorney?

While Legal Aid can only make pro bono case referrals directly to attorneys, legal support staff are often integral to a pro bono team's work. If you are a paralegal or legal assistant at a law firm, we encourage you to contact your firm's pro bono coordinator for guidance on ways to get involved. If you are a paralegal or legal assistant for the federal government, we recommend contacting the Federal Government Pro Bono Program Manager, Lara Eilhardt at Lara.Eilhardt@usdoj.gov.

Can I volunteer if I am a law student?

If you are a law student interested in getting involved with Legal Aid, we encourage you to apply for our [internship program](#).

Can I work on a case if I am not barred in DC?

Legal Aid requires that at least one member of the pro bono team be barred in DC. [DC Court of Appeals Rule 49](#) provides exceptions to the unauthorized practice of law rule for those engaging in pro bono work in the District. If you are not currently barred in DC, we encourage you to speak with your firm's pro bono committee or ethics counsel. If you are a federal government employee, we recommend contacting the Federal Government Pro Bono Program Manager, Lara Eilhardt at Lara.Eilhardt@usdoj.gov and inquire into a Rule 49 Sponsor.

Will Legal Aid serve as co-counsel on my pro bono case for an individual?

Contact the Legal Aid DC Pro Bono Program:

Danielle Rowan drowan@legalaiddc.org

Legal Aid does not co-counsel with pro bono attorneys on individual case referrals. When we refer a case to a pro bono team, we will assign an experienced Legal Aid attorney as a mentor who can answer questions, provide sample pleadings, and discuss relevant law and strategy. The mentor will not attend client meetings or any hearings.

Can I take on a pro bono case if I do not have experience with Legal Aid's practice areas?

Absolutely. We do not expect our pro bono attorneys to be subject matter experts in our practice areas. Legal Aid will share training resources with its pro bono attorneys so they can confidently enter their appearance in their pro bono matter. Legal Aid will also assign the pro bono team an expert mentor.

What pro bono opportunities does Legal Aid offer for those who are not interested in litigation?

Legal Aid has a variety of ways to engage in pro bono opportunities that do not involve litigation, specifically Social Security disability appeals and criminal record sealing. On some occasions, we may also have research opportunities. The Legal Aid Pro Bono Program is happy to work with interested attorneys in finding a case that works for them.

What are pro bono practice areas in which I am likely to gain courtroom experience?

Of the case types we refer to pro bono attorneys, the areas in which attorneys are more likely to have courtroom exposure are eviction defense and child custody cases.

Does Legal Aid provide malpractice insurance?

Legal Aid DC provides malpractice insurance to attorneys not otherwise covered.

I'm a federal government attorney and am unable to take certain cases because of positional conflicts. What kind of work can I do?

We are mindful of parameters applicable to federal government attorneys. Reach out to the Federal Government Pro Bono Program Manager, Lara Eilhardt at Lara.Eilhardt@usdoj.gov for additional guidance. We often recommend eviction defense, housing conditions, or child custody cases for government attorneys.

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