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# A Case Where Everyone Wins: Pro Bono Work and a Young Lawyer's Training

Marco A. Pulido - June 19, 2018

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In 2017, “86% of the civil legal problems reported by low-income Americans received inadequate or no legal help.” Legal Services Corporation, *The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans* 6 (June 2017). Prior studies of low-income groups similarly have found “that well over three-quarters of their legal problems remain unaddressed.” Many of these legal issues concern some of the most basic needs that someone can have: shelter, income, and physical protection.

Pro bono legal work is one avenue for filling this access-to-justice gap. It is also a terrific way for law students and newer lawyers to get invaluable legal training. More and more opportunities to participate in appellate pro bono are emerging for those newer lawyers who seek to gain appellate experience. See Ian Barker & Mary-Christine Sungaila, *Volunteer Pro Bono Appeals in the Federal Courts*, 36 A.B.A. App. Prac. Sec. Litig. 1 (2016).

Both as a law student and as a newer lawyer, I have benefited from taking advantage of pro bono opportunities, such as interacting directly with clients and helping to brief and argue a case before a federal circuit court. Perhaps some of these experiences will inspire other new lawyers to become involved in pro bono appellate work.

An advertisement for the ABA ID Theft Protection plan. It features a black and white photo of a person in a dark hoodie and cap, a fingerprint icon, and a padlock icon. The text reads: "ID THEFT IS A SCARY THOUGHT... But no need to be spooked when you can have a comprehensive ID Theft Protection plan. ABA Members get 20% off the list price." The price is shown as "\$14.98 ONLY" with a slash through it, and "\$11.98 Month". The ABA logo and "INSURANCE Administered by USI Affinity" are on the right, with a "BUY NOW" button below.

## Early Opportunities for Legal Work

Law school pro bono clinics provide fantastic training grounds for law students seeking to develop their legal writing and oral advocacy skills. At the UC Irvine School of Law, I had the privilege of participating in the Appellate Litigation Clinic, which provides students the opportunity to brief and argue an appellate case before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit under the supervision of experienced appellate lawyers.

practice to all litigants, and then break out into individual meetings with litigants about technical issues in their cases.” *Id.* at 32.

As a clinic volunteer, I directly interact with self-represented litigants seeking to navigate through the complex appellate process. Specifically, I provide guidance on appellate court rules, state appellate procedures, and resources available for self-represented individuals litigating cases before the California Court of Appeal.

### **Appellate Pro Bono Opportunities**

Newer lawyers seeking to get involved in pro bono appellate work have various resources available to find pro bono opportunities in their area. The American Bar Association’s *National Pro Bono Opportunities Guide* and *National Directory of Pro Bono Programs* provide comprehensive lists of pro bono opportunities in each state, and some of these opportunities involve pro bono appellate work.

For those seeking to take on a pro bono case before the U.S. courts of appeals, the American Bar Association’s *Guide to Volunteer Pro Bono Appeals in the Federal Courts* identifies pro bono opportunities typically available in each federal circuit court. *See* Am. Bar Ass’n Section of Litig., *Guide to Volunteer Pro Bono Appeals in the Federal Courts* (2016). Similarly, the American Bar Association’s *Manual on Pro Bono Appeals Programs for State Court Appeals* is a wonderful resource for newer lawyers seeking to get involved in pro bono programs established at state appellate courts around the country.

### **Conclusion**

Providing pro bono service has had an immense impact on my legal training, including an opportunity to brief and argue a case before a federal appellate court while I was still a law student. There are ample opportunities for law students and new lawyers to hone their legal skills while getting involved in much-needed pro bono work.

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