

The Department of Justice announced on June 16 the launch of a New York City branch of the Federal Government Pro Bono Program, a DOJ-led effort to connect lawyers working for federal agencies with low-income Americans in need of legal help. In New York, Legal Services NYC has been selected as a partner and will work with federal lawyers on projects involving family law and domestic violence, child support, credit counseling and ID theft, wills and *pro se* assistance.



The program, which received the American Bar Association's Pro Bono Publico Award in 2009, began in Washington, D.C. in 1996 and expanded to Chicago in 2008. Local legal services organizations, including D.C.'s Neighborhood Legal Services Program and Chicago's Legal Assistance Foundation, partner with the program to provide representation to clients.

Laurence Tribe, senior counselor for Access to Justice at DOJ, spoke at the launch. "We talk a lot about making justice more accessible, equal and fair," he said. "But today we do more than talk. Today we take action. In what we do here today, justice becomes an active verb."

Below are the LS-NYC projects selected for the program:

#### Family/Wills (Legal Services NYC-Bronx)

*Family Law/Domestic Violence Project:* This project will provide assistance in the areas of spousal support, orders of protection and child custody. Training for this project is provided in the evening by LS-NYC staff attorneys. After training, *pro bono* attorneys will be referred cases. During the course of their assigned case, *pro bono* attorneys are mentored by attorneys from InMotion, a Manhattan-based organization that provides free legal services to low-income women in New York City.

*Wills:* As a subsection to the LS-NYC-Bronx wills project, opportunities are available for *pro bono* attorneys to travel to meet with home-bound or nursing home-bound clients to prepare their wills and other related paperwork (*i.e.* powers of attorney). Training and mentoring would be provided by LS-NYC and cases would be assigned to *pro-bono* attorneys on an as-needed basis.

#### Family (Legal Support Unit)

*Child Support Project:* If there is sufficient *pro bono* attorney interest, LS-NYC will create a child support project to represent clients in child support proceedings. Training and mentoring for this project would be provided by LS-NYC staff attorneys. After training, *pro bono* attorneys will be referred cases. *Pro bono* attorneys can provide guidance to clients who can participate in these proceedings *pro se*. Alternatively, in child support cases that are more complex, *pro bono* representation is essential. Such opportunities could provide *pro bono* attorneys with trial experience. Opportunities for appellate and policy work in this area are also significant.

#### Consumer (Legal Services NYC-Bronx and Manhattan Legal Services)

*Credit Counseling/ID Theft:* As a subsection to their consumer-debt collection defense project, LS-NYC has a need for *pro bono* attorneys to assist clients with credit counseling/ID theft issues. After training, *pro bono* attorneys would be paired with a LS-NYC staff attorney to assist with a consumer fraud case or credit counseling. Cases would be assigned to *pro bono* attorneys on an as-needed basis.

*Civil Legal Advice and Resource Office Project (CLARO):* The CLARO Project is similar to other borough CLARO projects in that it provides advice-only to *pro se* defendants with consumer debt cases in New York County Civil Court.

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