

Community Law Program



CLP is a non-profit corporation formed in 1989 by members of the St. Petersburg Bar Association concerned about the civil legal needs of low income residents of Southern Pinellas County, Florida. Over the years, CLP has recruited a panel of approximately 400 St. Petersburg area attorneys who provide free assistance to thousands of people in need of civil legal assistance each year. To volunteer for pro bono service, contact Community Law Program at 727-582-7480.



One client, one attorney, one promise.

by Kimberly Rogers

Community Law Program proudly debuts ONE, a statewide campaign to encourage attorneys to participate in pro bono legal services through an organized legal services program. I'm sure you're asking, what does ONE mean? It's pretty self explanatory and simple.... it takes just one client in need matched with one willing attorney to fulfill one promise.

The next question I'm sure you're asking is: are we really just asking every attorney to accept just one case? The answer to that question is absolutely! However, this is much easier said than done, because the promise is only fulfilled if every attorney accepts one case. Currently, only approximately 10 - 15% of the attorneys eligible to perform pro bono, located in southern Pinellas County (i.e., with a Fla. Bar address located south of Ulmerton Road), actually participate through the Community Law Program. These percentages are slightly higher for members of the St. Petersburg Bar Association, but not by much. Under Rule 4-6.1 of the Rules Regulating The Florida Bar, only members of the judiciary or their staff and government lawyers who are prohibited from performing legal services by constitutional, statutory, rule, or regulation, retired, suspended, and attorneys placed on the inactive list for incapacity are exempt from the professional aspirational requirement to perform pro bono legal services. Everyone else is required to fulfill this aspirational goal.

Having been a member of the private bar for several years and trying to generate business myself prior to becoming involved with CLP, I'll be the first to admit that this aspirational requirement is not easy. You can unknowingly get involved in a client's case that becomes extremely time-consuming, emotionally draining, and complex.

This is why ONE is sure to appeal to most attorneys who have never done pro bono legal services through an organized program. With ONE, we have worked very hard at CLP to

come up with a number of pro bono volunteer opportunities that are especially designed to require a minimal commitment of time, yet fulfill a need within our client population that is critical. To summarize these opportunities, you can fulfill the ONE promise for one client on behalf of CLP by signing up to:

- Assist an elderly person or single parent raising children obtain an order determining homestead or distribute a modest estate through summary administration
- Protect a survivor of domestic violence or her (his) children by obtaining a domestic violence injunction
- Help a client overcome an impediment to gainful work by getting a criminal record sealed or expunged
- Help a start-up non-profit organization obtain their federal tax-exempt designation
- Help a client recently let go from employment meet their basic living needs by qualifying for unemployment compensation

These are just a few examples of the types of time-sensitive opportunities CLP can provide to willing private attorneys. There are many other opportunities, including participating in one or more of our regularly held advice clinics, which are offered at various locations and times of the day, including evenings. In addition, with the upcoming circuit-wide implementation of court-ordered mediation in foreclosure cases, there is bound to be many clients in need of representation.

We will be providing CLE trainings and opportunities to receive training in all of these areas in the near future. Upcoming, we will be offering a CLE training on domestic violence on May 21st and then another one to assist non-profit organizations on June 10th. Both trainings will be free of charge if you agree to accept a case. Be on the look out for flyers, eblasts, and other information about these and other training opportunities offered as a result of ONE.

Finally, there's one final selling point I'd like you to consider. I am very much aware that there are many attorneys who perform pro bono work for clients "on their own," as opposed to participating with an organized legal services program such as CLP. Assuming the work that is being done qualifies as pro bono legal services (as opposed to merely continuing to do work for clients who have stopped paying for services), I honestly can't understand why there would be any hesitation about doing this work with an organization like CLP! If the motivation for doing pro bono "on your own" is the ability to choose one's own clients, there is no reason why that arrangement has to change by joining CLP. As long as the client is financially eligible for free legal services (based upon federal poverty guidelines for income and assets, which we would be happy to determine), CLP has no problem with attorneys letting us know who they'd like to represent pro bono. In fact, it makes it easier for us when attorneys choose their own clients, because we know it's more likely than not that the attorney-client relationship will be more successful that way. In addition, as a volunteer with CLP, you receive the following additional benefits: (1) use of newly expanded office space to meet with clients, if needed; (2) malpractice liability insurance coverage; (3) special recognition of activities in publications and at events; (4) access to other attorneys as mentors; and (5) restricted access to web-based trainings and other trainings on poverty law issues.

With all that said, it is my sincere desire that we can at least double the level of pro bono participation through CLP over the next year and for the next three years. Even at that rate, we still will not be at 100% pro bono participation, but we will be ever closer to fulfilling the ONE promise for thousands of vulnerable clients, an ever growing population!

For more information about ONE and to view a dynamic video, go to www.onepromiseflorida.org.