

PILI Pro Bono Mentorship Policy Guide

Program Purpose

Research shows that a major barrier preventing attorneys from doing more pro bono is the lack of skills or experience in the practice areas needed by clients. This program is designed to ease and eliminate that barrier by training and supporting attorneys in pro bono matters.

Through PILI's Pro Bono Mentorship Program, volunteer attorneys who lack experience in a particular area of law are paired with a more experienced attorney for advice and counsel to ensure competent representation of pro bono clients. A mentor or mentee will have the opportunity to elect whether to assist clients with various types of cases, including advice, limited scope and discrete services, and full representation. The purpose of our program is to increase the number of clients who receive pro bono assistance while simultaneously offering a unique and invaluable learning opportunity for attorneys.

PILI's Pro Bono Mentorship Program is a collaboration between the Public Interest Law Initiative, its Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committees around Illinois, and legal service providers like Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation and Prairie State Legal Services. When one signs up as a mentor or mentee, the legal service provider matches them with a pro bono matter in the area of law they are interested in or experienced. Please note, PILI will not be directly matching mentors and mentees, information submitted will be forwarded to the legal service provider in order to make the connection.

Although modeled in part after the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism Lawyer-to-Lawyer Mentoring Program, PILI's Pro Bono Mentorship Program does not qualify for CLE credit. If you are interested in the Lawyer-to-Lawyer Mentoring Program, which can be done in conjunction with PILI's Pro Bono Mentorship Program, please visit www.2civility.org for more information.

Program Goals

PILI's Pro Bono Mentorship Program creates an opportunity for an attorney experienced in one area of law ("mentor") to provide professional guidance and share practical knowledge with an attorney who is not as experienced in that area of law ("mentee") and is interested in helping in a pro bono matter.

Do you have experience working on pro bono cases or do you have experience in a practice area that could be helpful to an attorney on a pro bono case? Would you or someone you know make a good pro bono mentor? We need mentors from all over the state and in many practice areas, so please encourage others to sign up!

Are you experienced in one area of law but interested in gaining experience in another practice area? Even seasoned attorneys can participate as a mentee. Please share this opportunity with friends and colleagues.

Qualifications

Mentees seeking to participate in the Pro Bono Mentorship program must follow the minimum standards:

- Be registered in the Illinois ARDC Master Roll of Attorneys as active or as retired, inactive, or out-of-state but registered to perform pro bono services through an approved legal services organization;
- Never have been disbarred from the practice of law in any state or jurisdiction, and have no formal disciplinary complaints pending; and
- Practice law in Illinois or intend to practice law in Illinois.

Mentors seeking to participate in the Pro Bono Mentorship program must follow the minimum standards:

- Be registered on the Illinois ARDC Master Roll of Attorneys as active and in good standing;
- Practice law in Illinois or intend to practice law in Illinois;
- Never have been suspended or disbarred from the practice of law in any state or jurisdiction, and have no formal disciplinary complaints pending; and
- Have practiced law for at least five years with experience in the specific area of law for the case assigned.

Lawyers seeking to participate in PILI's Pro Bono Mentorship Program may complete and submit a Mentee or Mentor Application. Note participants are also able to apply to be both a mentor and mentee based on their experience in particular areas of law.

Mentor and Mentee Responsibilities

The mentor and mentee will be matched and connected with a pro bono case in a specific area of law. The Program is designed to be flexible depending on the type of case and needs of the mentee.

After being paired and assigned a pro bono case, the mentor and mentee shall meet to discuss the area of law and details of the case. The mentoring pair will make a plan for how their case should move forward. Frequent interaction between the mentor and mentee is encouraged throughout the duration of the pro bono matter through a variety of means, including e-mail, telephone, and text messaging. Although certain circumstances may arise where an in-person meeting is prohibitive, it is strongly encouraged to meet in person at least initially.

Although we strive for a highly collaborative partnership, the mentee attorney will be the official attorney of record for the pro bono matter. The mentor attorney will not be added as co-counsel of record or otherwise associated with the case in the court record, except through the legal service agency.

Both mentor and mentee must acknowledge any communication between mentor and mentee related to the pro bono matter will be confidential as to the client confidences and all aspects of preparation of the case. A similar acknowledgement should be made with each client as part of the intake process and included as part of a retainer agreement with the attorney of record. For certain types of cases there may be court ordered costs, such as Guardian Ad Litem fees or publication costs, for which the client may be responsible. These costs may be escrowed through the legal service provider. Neither mentor or mentee will expect any fees or charge the client and mentor and mentee will be responsible for their own costs incurred through the duration or related to the pro bono matter.

Resources and Troubleshooting

It is imperative that both the Mentor and Mentee maintain professional liability insurance. While we do not anticipate any increased risk of malpractice claims or professional responsibility grievances arising from this program, malpractice insurance is available through the legal service provider for pro bono attorneys who accept a case.

Prior to engaging with any client or discussing case-specific information beyond hypotheticals, Mentors and Mentees must perform a comprehensive conflicts check in accordance with Illinois Rules of Professional Responsibility.

Matching mentees with mentors is not an exact science. Personal disagreements can be a natural result of putting diverse people together and asking them to work as partners. If you experience issues with your mentor or mentee, please contact Brent Page at PILI at bpage@pili.org.

Thank you

Many attorneys find that pro bono work can be a great opportunity to gain skills and learn new areas of law while at the same time helping someone in need of assistance. Our goal is for this program to support those endeavors. Thank you for your interest in volunteering and your commitment to equal access to justice for all!