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CONTRIBUTORS

Jennafer Bonello
Reena Glazer
Tammy Taylor
Eva-Marie Malone,
Editor

Foreclosure Prevention Efforts Aided by Innovative Pro Bono Programs

Initially incited by an excess of subprime mortgages, the mortgage crisis and the drastic increase in foreclosures are changing the face of home ownership. Forecasters expect that at least two million people will lose their homes in upcoming months. The rarely-mentioned statistic is the resulting loss of property value to neighboring homes. This loss will be felt most keenly by lower- and lower-middle-income families, whose primary asset is their home. At a well-attended and lively session at this year's Seminar/Forum, several attendees indicated an interest in finding creative and useful solutions to prevent people from losing their homes.

Legal services programs – frequently the primary source of legal assistance to the poor – are being swamped with requests for foreclosure prevention assistance. Debbie Halliskey, a staff lawyer for Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida, noted 'Prior to December we had five cases. Then the number of foreclosures began to exceed our typical landlord/evictions.' Several innovative programs are being developed to offer foreclosure prevention assistance to homeowners – capacity-building grants, unique public/private partnerships, and new state programs.

[[FULL STORY](#)]

National Equal Justice Library Now Housed at the Edward Bennett Williams Library at Georgetown University Law Center

On Tuesday, March 25, 2008, the Board of Directors of the Consortium for the National Equal Justice Library, its constituent organizations (the American Bar Association, The National Legal Aid & Defender Association, and the American Association of Law Libraries), and the Dean, faculty, and students of Georgetown University Law Center presented a symposium and celebration of the National Equal Justice Library's arrival at the Law Center and the Library's acceptance of the papers of legal aid innovator, Gary Bellow.

This inaugural and historic event featured five panels to commemorate the move of the National Equal Justice Library from Washington College of Law at American University to the Law Center in 2007. The event also presented the writings of Gary Bellow.



CONTACT US

Pro Bono Institute
at Georgetown University Law
Center
600 New Jersey Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20001

(202) 662-9699
(202) 662-9683 F

wire@probonoinst.org
www.probonoinst.org
www.cpbo.org

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[[FULL STORY](#)]

The Second Circuit Amends *Arbor Hill* Opinion Regarding Attorneys' Fees Awards

As [previously reported in the *Wire*](#), a year ago the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit issued an opinion in *Arbor Hill Concerned Citizens Neighborhood Ass'n v. County of Albany* that had troubling implications for pro bono attorneys. The original opinion seemed to suggest that a key factor in awarding attorneys' fees could be whether the attorney originally agreed to handle the matter on a pro bono basis or to otherwise accept a lower rate in order to 'promote the lawyer's own reputational or societal goals.' The Pro Bono Institute worked with law firms that submitted amicus briefs pointing out the dampening effect that the Court's original ruling would have on the pro bono efforts of some law firms and on the enforcement of civil rights laws generally.

On April 10, 2008, the Second Circuit issued an amended opinion and clarified that its decision 'in no way suggests that attorneys from nonprofit organizations or attorneys with private law firms engaged in pro bono are excluded from the usual approach to determining attorneys' fees' and added a lengthy footnote that explicated past case law on the issue. Although some residual confusion lingers, the amended opinion is generally regarded as a positive development. Read below for additional details of the amended opinion.

[[FULL STORY](#)]

Law Firm Pro Bono Project Member Benefit – Pro Bono Informational Programs for Summer Associates

Pro bono has become a significant part of the summer associate experience at most law firms. This summer, Law Firm Pro Bono Project staff members are available again to participate in a variety of firm events for summer associates. One popular possibility is an informational program, during which Law Firm Pro Bono Project staff along with firm associates, partners, and pro bono committee members, discuss a wide variety of pro bono-related topics, including: the relationship of pro bono to professional development; national trends in pro bono; new 'hot' areas in pro bono; and the particular operations of the firm's pro bono program. Such programs can be important representations of a firm's commitment to pro bono and a useful tool for orienting and engaging your newest attorneys. If you are interested in scheduling a meeting at your firm as part of your summer associate program, please contact Jodi Sackel, Law Firm Pro Bono Project Assistant at jsackel@probonoinst.org or 202.662.4023. Please note that it may not be possible to fill all requests this year.

[[FULL STORY](#)]

Transactional Pro Bono in Minneapolis

The Minneapolis/St. Paul area is home to a thriving pro bono culture. An article in the February 2008 *Twin Cities Business* magazine calls attention to the number of leading law firms in Minneapolis/St. Paul that are finding innovative methods to provide transactional pro bono services to local organizations and businesses. Several of the firms mentioned in the article are Law Firm Pro Bono Project Member firms, including: **Fredrikson & Byron, PA** and **Faegre & Benson, LLP**. By successfully utilizing existing resources and developing new resources, the Minneapolis area has attempted to create a successful model of transactional pro bono. Clearly, as this local business journal has noted, those efforts have been successful.

In addition to a pro bono consortium, the area hosted a productive and instructive 'House Call' last year. Firms have been able to develop associate skills, increase firm loyalty, and provide work for practice groups by taking on matters as diverse and challenging as: business incorporation, franchising advice, protecting intellectual property rights, and advice on human resources. Read the full story below to see how Manny's Tortas in the Twin Cities received transactional pro bono advice from a leading firm that provided this spirited entrepreneur an opportunity to establish and develop a successful business.

[[FULL STORY](#)]

PB Victory: Reed Smith Wins Amnesty International's Right to Protect Sources

Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) became involved in a case brought by the Legal Aid Society of New York against the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Brooklyn. Attorneys for the MDC attempted to obtain information about AIUSA's confidential interviews researching conditions at the detention center, and the organization sought to protect its sources under the federal journalist's privilege. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York affirmed the organization's First Amendment right to protect its confidential sources, the first time a U.S. court has done so. Read the full story for more detail on this exciting pro bono victory by Reed Smith LLP, a Charter Signatory to the Law Firm Pro Bono ChallengeSM.

[[FULL STORY](#)]