



**VOLUNTEER
LAWYERS**
PROJECT

NEW VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

WELCOME

Please introduce yourself in the chat and answer the following question:

What interests you most about volunteering with VLP?



NEW VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

presented by:



EMELIA ANDRES
PRO BONO MANAGER
EANDRES@VLPNET.ORG



ABIGAIL MCCOURT, ESQ.
FAMILY LAW AND GUARDIANSHIP
ATTORNEY
AMCCOURT@VLPNET.ORG

WHO IS VLP?



GIVING JUSTICE A VOICE

- 
- SMALL STAFF
 - CIVIL CASES
 - FOCUS ON RECRUITING, TRAINING, AND MENTORING THE PRIVATE BAR
 - MENTORSHIP, SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

WHO WE SERVE



- LOW INCOME
 - BASED ON INCOME AND ASSETS



- SCREENED FOR ELIGIBILITY



- MEET VLP'S CASE PRIORITIES

VLP LEGAL UNITS

- **Housing:** tenant/landlord including: eviction, affirmative conditions, homeownership preservation
- **Bankruptcy:** Chapter 7 bankruptcies
- **Probate:** guardianship, wills, health care proxies, powers of attorney.
- **Consumer:** debt collection defense; affirmative debt collection claims; credit reporting issues
- **Family:** divorce, paternity, child support, custody, abuse prevention orders
- **Employment:** unemployment, wage & hour

VLP 2023 **STATS**



540

New Pro Bono
Case Assignments



7560

Pro Bono
Hours Logged



325

Unique
Volunteers



600

Cases with
Pro Bono
Participation



Working with Low Income Clients

COMMUNICATION STYLE

The world, especially court, requires formal communication.



Formal register is required to succeed in the world.

- Use for job interviews, meeting new people, asking for help, and talking to a person of authority.
- Required for court.

Our clients may speak in a more casual tone.

- Friendly tone usually used with friends.
- Can come across as rude or improper in formal situations.

Their lives and priorities may look different than yours.

- **Clients can have difficulty keeping appointments.**

- Child Care
- Demanding Work Schedules
- Transportation Issues

- **They can be difficult to reach.**

- Housing isn't always stable
- Phones run out of minutes
- Internet may not always work
- May forget to return your calls because other, more pressing issues come up

- **You may have to be flexible.**

- Schedule appointments around their work hours
- Think about if they will have to bring their children with them
- Find a place that is easy to get to if transportation is a concern

- **What to do if you lose touch with your client:**

- Call VLP so we can reach out to the client
- Try sending a letter or email


Considerations in the Current Climate

Try to maintain quality communication

- Phone calls and video chats will help you form a better relationship with your client than email.
- BUT access to the internet, computers, and smart phones is a luxury.
- Client may have lost access to their ability to review, scan, and print documents.

New legal issues may arise as a result of the pandemic

- You should direct clients to reach out to us with new legal issues.
- You should only help with the legal issue outlined in the LAR or 3-party agreement.



What is Limited Assistance Representation?

LIMITED ASSISTANCE REPRESENTATION

Limited Assistance Representation (LAR) allows an attorney to represent a client briefly on a specific issue.

*VLP clinics are LAR opportunities

You must review the LAR handbook to become certified to provide limited assistance representation. You can also watch the training video.

LAR registration is effective upon reviewing the training materials.

You do not need to review the materials to complete paperwork or answer questions. You **MUST** be LAR certified to represent a client in court under LAR guidelines.



HOW LAR WORKS AT VLP



For Documents:

Stamp paperwork “Prepared with the Assistance of Counsel” as required by LAR guidelines

For Hearings:

File a Notice of Limited Appearance (NLA) when starting work and a Notice of Withdrawal of Limited Appearance (NWLA) after work is completed



VLP

**VOLUNTEER
OPPORTUNITIES**

ADVICE PANELS

A QUICK, NO STRINGS ATTACHED VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY. YOU CAN VOLUNTEER FROM ANYWHERE! ATTORNEYS HELP CLIENTS ON A LIMITED ASSISTANCE BASIS.

How it Works:

- VLP screens clients who could use more advice.
 - Don't fit in any legal aid organization's priorities but would benefit from advice
- Attorneys sign up for specific legal areas.
- The attorney selects their desired amount of time to give advice.
- VLP sends the attorney the client's information and a brief summary of the issues.
- The attorney calls during their set time and provides advice.

Legal Areas

- **Housing**
- **Family**
- **Employment**
- **Wills & Trusts**

VLP CLINICS



VLP holds weekly clinics in a range of legal areas. Most clinics are held in a courthouse. Some clinics are for drafting documents only, and some clinics aid clients with hearings the same day.

Attorneys represent clients on a limited assistance basis.

VLP CLINICS

Family Law and Guardianship Clinic

Volunteers provide help to clients facing a variety of Family Law issues or Guardianship needs. These clinics focus on drafting and advice.

Location and Times:

- Every 1st and 3rd Wednesday from 9am-2pm at Suffolk Probate and Family Court (CSC office space walk-in clients)
- Every 2nd and 4th Wednesday on VLP's Zoom Account (scheduled clients)

How It Works:

- VLP screens clients for eligibility.
- Volunteers sign up on VLP's website.
- We send you the Zoom information.
- At the clinic, meet with your client in a breakout room.
- VLP staff is available to meet with you in your breakout room or separately.

VLP CLINICS

Eastern Housing Court Lawyer for the Day

Volunteers assist pro se tenants with their eviction cases/affirmative cases against their landlords.

Location and Time: In- Person First, Third, Fifth, Tuesday

- **IN-PERSON** from 9:30am-12:30pm and 11:30am-2:30pm at Eastern Housing Court
Edward W. Brooke Court House, 24 New Chardon St., Boston, MA 02114

How It Works:

- Volunteers sign-up to assist client's in-person from 9:30am-12:30 pm and 11:30pm-2:30pm at the Eastern Housing Court using VLP's online sign-up sheet.
- VLP staff will conduct a quick intake and screen clients for eligibility.
- VLP Staff Attorneys are always present to mentor, supervise, and assist volunteers while they provide assistance to pro se litigants.
 - Types of assistance offered: advice, drafting, mediation, representation in court.
 - Volunteers can work alone, in pairs, or shadow VLP staff attorneys.

VLP CLINICS

Housing Answer and Discovery Clinic

Volunteers assist pro se tenants with completing their Answer and Discovery documents.

The **Answer** is the tenant's opportunity to respond to their landlord's reasons for eviction. It is where tenants can assert defenses to the eviction, counterclaims they may have against their landlord, and most importantly, they can request a jury trial.

The **Discovery** request allows tenants to receive information and documents that will help them fight their eviction case in court. It will also help tenants prepare their defenses to eviction and counterclaims against their landlord.

Location and Time: EVERY THURSDAY on Zoom

- We host the clinic 11am-1pm
- It will take approximately two (2) hours to complete the Answer and Discovery documents

How It Works:

- Volunteers will work with pro se tenants facing eviction and will help them complete their Answer and Discovery documents using an online tool.
- Once the documents are complete, a VLP staff attorney will review the tenant's documents and will file them with the court and will serve a copy on the tenant's landlord or their landlord's attorney.

VLP CLINICS

Consumer Lawyer for the Day

Volunteers assist defendants in their small claim debt collection cases and represent the client in their hearing.

Location and Time:

(BMC Central) 1st & 3rd Thursdays of the month. 11am In Person

(BMC Dorchester) 2nd & 4th Thursdays of the month. 11am session and 2pm session – In person

(BMC Central – Civil Session) 1st & 3rd Wednesdays of the month. 9am – 1pm - Virtual

Additional cases available for LAR or full representation aside from the above clinic sessions

How It Works:

- VLP staff attend the court session on Zoom and in-person.
- Virtual Court Clinics: Potential clients notify court that they would like to contact VLP for legal assistance. The potential client's case gets continued.
- VLP's paralegal assigns a client to an available volunteer who is provided case details.
- Volunteer and client schedule a time to meet virtually and work on settlement options or prepare for trial.
- In Person Clinics: Potential clients approach VLP for legal assistance. New volunteers first shadow VLP staff attorneys at clinic. VLP will match a potential client with a volunteer who will offer a range of assistance, including advice or representation, under the supervision of VLP's staff attorney.

VLP CLINICS

Wage Theft Clinic

Volunteers assist participants with potential wage theft claims.

Location and Time:

One Monday per month (it varies based on the AGO's schedule, linked here: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/free-wage-theft-legal-clinic>)

Clinics are held at: Suffolk Law School, First Floor Function Room, [120 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02108](#)

Additional cases available for LAR or full representation aside from the above clinic sessions

How It Works:

- The AGO hosts the clinic at Suffolk Law, VLP attends and sets up our own tables at the clinic (both for staff and participating volunteers)
- The AGO sends potentially eligible clients to VLP's tables
- VLP's paralegal screens clients and then assigns them to an available volunteer
- Volunteers and clients will meet and volunteer provides clients with advice or brief services, depending on the facts of the case

PROJECTS

Civil Appeals Clinic

Volunteers meet with clients to discuss final judgements and discuss appellate issues and procedures. This clinic works on a rotating basis with volunteers only attending every 11-12 weeks. This project is hosted with other organizations and has specific required trainings. Volunteers must review the training materials before attending.

Locations and Time:

Second and Fourth Wednesday of the month, 2:30pm to 5pm on VLP's Zoom Account

PROJECTS

Landlord Advocacy

The VLP Landlord Advocacy Program is a team of lawyers, law students, paralegals and members of the legal community working together to advocate for the low-income "mom and pop" landlords who live in and rent out part of their multi-family homes. The Landlord Advocacy team's goal is to provide upstream assistance to low-income landlords of 2-3 family properties. In addition to programs serving those who are in court or considering court, the Landlord team strives to address the broader issues our landlord population faces. The landlord volunteer programs and services were developed to find, educate, and advise small landlords on their rights and responsibilities and provide assistance and resources when applicable. Training and staff support will be provided

Locations and Time:

Via Zoom and Flexible

FULL REP CASES

Some of our cases reach the level of needing a pro bono attorney to represent the client.

How to Take a Case

- Pro Bono Manager sends out the cases to the appropriate panel every Wednesday.
- If you are interested, you request the case.
- If the case is still available, the Pro Bono Manager will assign the case to you:
 - Legal Server access
 - Interpreter
 - Mentor

Need to Knows

- You will have access to the referral memo, pertinent case documents, and a three-party retainer in Legal Server.
 - You MUST complete the three-party retainer.
- You will handle the case as your own with guidance and legal support from VLP staff.
- You should keep us updated on the status of the case.
 - Emailed status updates from VLP paralegal
 - Other communication as needed or desired

REMOTE AND IN-PERSON CLINIC EXPECTATIONS

Preparation

- Ensure that you are on-time and ready to support VLP's Clients
- Communicate with paralegal or staff attorney if you are running late or need to leave clinic early

Dress Code (Even while volunteering Remotely)

- **Do's:** Formal Business Dress Attire, Dress Shirts, Ties, Blouses, Blazers, Suit Jackets
- **Don'ts:** Casual Attire: T-Shirts, Sweatshirts, leggings, yoga pants, hats

First time Volunteers

- In some legal areas it is important to shadow the first couple times you volunteer to get the hang of it before taking a client on your own. You can do that by indicating or selecting "Shadow only" on the clinic signup sheets

Confidentiality

- Use Headphones
- Private space
- Ensure your camera is turned on and you have a clean zoom background free of distraction



Questions?

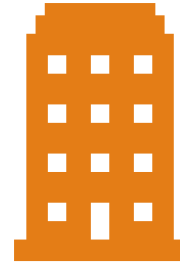
WHAT VLP PROVIDES



**Mentorship &
Support**



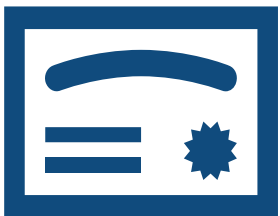
**Free
Trainings**



Meeting Space



Lunches & Events



MCLE Vouchers



**Malpractice
Insurance**



Interpreters

UPCOMING TRAININGS



- VLP now has all trainings available online!
- Links can be sent to you for any training you're interested in.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



- VLP internships are extremely rewarding experiences and provide crucial support and aid to our continuing mission.
- VLP hosts interns in all our legal units for Spring, Summer, and Fall terms
- Requirements:
 - Minimum of 12hours per week
 - Must be enrolled as a student



Working with Interpreters

WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS

Do's

- Speak in a normal tone.
- Speak directly to the client. Eye contact is important.
- Speak slowly if you are using complex legal terms or specific dates/numbers/etc.
- Allow the interpreter to clarify questions for a client or explain a word in a different way if their native language does not have a word for it.
- Use the interpreter for all conversations with the client.

Don'ts

- Don't talk louder. The interpreter understands you and talking louder will not make the client understand better.
- Don't talk to the interpreter only. The client is still the focus.
- Don't tell the interpreter to explain something to the client for you. If you need a term, document, etc. explained, you should explain it as you would to an English speaking or hearing client.
- Don't let the client and interpreter speak back and forth too long without clarifying what is happening. Make sure the interpreter is not giving legal advice.
- Don't try to speak with the client yourself if you are not fluent in their language.

DENIS MAGUIRE AWARDEE



JULIUS AUGUSTUS HALSTEAD

"One of the biggest lessons
I have learned by volunteering
with VLP is how important it is
to give people an opportunity
to tell their story."
-Julius Halstead,



VLP'S IMPACT

WHAT OUR VOLUNTEERS AND CLIENTS SAY

“VLP always does a great job assembling the raw data from the client and makes our job so much easier (saves us hours!).”

“My mentors were very helpful in answering all my questions promptly and clearly. While preparing for the uncontested hearing, I felt comfortable asking any question I had.”

“This was a wonderful experience for a very kind and grateful client.”

“[I realized] I wasn't the only person this ever happened to. And there was a light at the end of the tunnel.”
-Bankruptcy Client

“The fact of knowing that I can count on your help in moments of financial struggle is like a blessing for me.”

-Divorce Client

“Major relief knowing that once I pass my children will be left with something and that I took the proper step to secure my assets and leave them with something.”

-Will Client

WHAT'S NEXT?



- **You will receive a follow up email this week**
 - It will have a link to a survey
 - Contact information
 - Area of law you are interested in
 - If you are interested in:
 - Taking a case
 - Volunteering at a clinic
 - Providing advice
- **Questions?** Contact **Emelia Andres**
Pro Bono Manager eandres@vlpnet.org



Questions?