

Momentum
for Justice



VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT

2026 ANNUAL VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION EVENT PROGRAM BOOK

Presenting Sponsor

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Ropes & Gray is proud to support **VLP's 2026 Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event**

We congratulate this year's honorees:

Sharyn T. Sooho, Esq.

Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP

Denis Maguire Pro Bono Awardees

The Honorable Raymond Dougan (Ret.)

Judge Edward M. Ginsburg Gideon's Trumpet Award

Dick Bauer, Esq.

Yvette C. Mendez Award

Steve Russo, Esq.

Joanna Allison Legacy of Service Award

Program

OPENING REMARKS

Geraldine Gruvis-Pizarro, Esq.
Executive Director, VLP

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Suma V. Nair, Esq.
Immediate Past President of the Boston Bar Association

Introduction by Geraldine Gruvis-Pizarro, Esq.,
Executive Director, VLP

DENIS MAGUIRE PRO BONO AWARD

Presented by Betsy Gwin, Esq.
Deputy Director, VLP
Presented by Abigail McCourt, Esq.
Supervising Attorney, VLP Family Law & Guardianship Unit

YVETTE C. MENDEZ AWARD

Presented by Geraldine Gruvis-Pizarro, Esq.
Executive Director, VLP

JUDGE EDWARD M. GINSBURG GIDEON'S TRUMPET AWARD

Presented by Maggie Lee, Esq.
Supervising Attorney, VLP Economic Fairness Unit

JOANNA ALLISON LEGACY OF SERVICE AWARD

Presented by William (Rob) Roberts, Esq.
Chair, VLP Board of Directors

CLOSING REMARKS



Opening Remarks



It is an incredible honor to welcome you to Volunteer Lawyers Project's Annual Appreciation Event and, this year, to do so as VLP's Executive Director.

Leading this organization is a responsibility I hold with tremendous pride and gratitude. I have the privilege of seeing every day what is possible when talented, compassionate people come together around a shared belief: **that access to justice should not depend on how much money you have.**

I am deeply grateful for the extraordinary community that makes that belief a reality: our dedicated staff, who bring skill, compassion, and determination to this work every day; our volunteer attorneys, who generously give their time and expertise; the law firms that continue to invest in pro bono service; and our community partners, who work alongside us to make sure people can find the help they need. It is not an easy time to take the helm of a legal aid organization. The challenges facing our clients and our communities are real, and the need for civil legal aid remains enormous. But I am also incredibly hopeful, because I know who stands beside us.

I know I can count on our staff to keep fighting the good fight. I know our volunteers will continue to answer the call, and I know our firms, supporters, and community partners will continue to rally around our clients when they need us most.

That is what Momentum for Justice means to me. It is not simply the work of one organization. It is what happens when all of us keep showing up — for our clients, for our communities, and for the promise of equal access to justice.

Thank you for showing up. Thank you for believing in this work and, most importantly, thank you for helping VLP continue to move justice forward.

With Gratitude,

Geraldine Gruvis-Pizarro

Geraldine Gruvis-Pizarro

Keynote Speaker

Suma V. Nair, Esq.

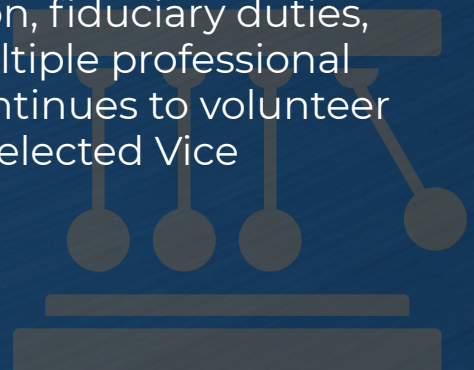


Suma is the immediate past President of the Boston Bar Association, where she has spent the last two decades volunteering in various roles at both the Association and its affiliated Foundation. In her professional life, Suma is a nationally recognized estate and tax planning and fiduciary advisor with over 20 years of experience advising ultra-high net worth families, professional and corporate fiduciaries, and nonprofit organizations, both in private practice as a lawyer at Goulston & Storrs, and as Chief Fiduciary Officer of Fiduciary Trust Company.

Suma is a proven strategic leader in law firm and corporate contexts with substantial board-level and executive management experience.

Through her consulting company, SVN Solutions LLC, Suma provides strategic advice to businesses that already offer or are considering offering trustee services to their clients to help increase revenue and market recognition while also reducing risk. She develops client-tailored, plain-language educational programs to inform businesses about trustee responsibilities and practical approaches to meeting their fiduciary duties.

Suma is a frequent speaker on various aspects of estate planning, trusteeship and trust administration, fiduciary duties, charitable planning, and tax planning for multiple professional continuing legal education sponsors. She continues to volunteer her time to the Boston Bar and was recently elected Vice President of the ACLU of Massachusetts.



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Award Descriptions

DENIS MAGUIRE PRO BONO AWARD

Denis Maguire, who served as the treasurer of both the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) and Boston Bar Association, personified the commitment to public interest for which Boston lawyers are noted. VLP established the Denis Maguire Pro Bono Award in 1989 to honor the work of outstanding members of its pro bono panel and to commemorate Denis Maguire's commitment to VLP and access to justice through pro bono efforts.

YVETTE C. MENDEZ AWARD

The Yvette C. Mendez Award was created to recognize a member or project of the Greater Boston Bar that has made an extraordinary contribution to furthering equal access to justice in ways beyond a traditional law practice. The award was established in honor of Yvette Mendez, an African American woman who was president of the Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys, a litigator, teacher, civil rights advocate and VLP Board member. The Yvette C. Mendez Award is a distinguished honor that is not awarded annually. The award has only been bestowed six times since it was established in 2003.

JUDGE EDWARD M. GINSBURG GIDEON'S TRUMPET AWARD

The Judge Edward M. Ginsburg Gideon's Trumpet Award was established in 2003 to honor the outstanding work of a member of the pro bono panel of VLP's Senior Partners for Justice project. The late Judge Edward Ginsburg, who founded Seniors Partners for Justice, named the award after the book Gideon's Trumpet by Anthony Lewis, which chronicles the establishment of the right to counsel in criminal cases at all levels of the American judicial system. The award honors those striving to provide similar access to justice in civil matters.

Award Descriptions

JOANNA ALLISON LEGACY OF SERVICE AWARD

The Joanna Allison Legacy of Service Award was created in 2025, upon the occasion of Joanna Allison's retirement, to recognize her extraordinary lifetime commitment to social justice and equal access to justice. For over three decades, Joanna Allison was a transformative force in ensuring equal access to legal representation, championing the rights of underserved individuals regardless of their socioeconomic background. As Executive Director of the Volunteer Lawyers Project from 2015 to 2025, and with roots extending to her early work at the Legal Aid Society of Northwest North Carolina, Joanna exemplified unwavering dedication to public service and justice.



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2026 Denis Maguire Pro Bono Awardee

Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP

The logo for Nutter, featuring the word "Nutter" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. A stylized blue swoosh is positioned above the letter 't'.

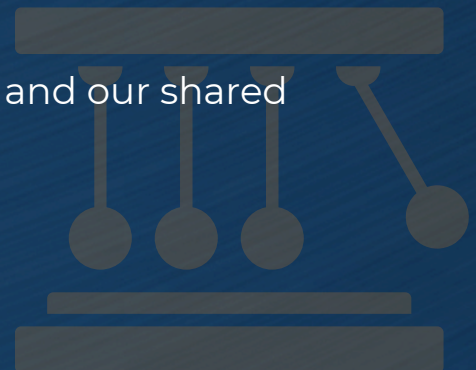
Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP (Nutter), a longstanding law firm based in Boston, has been volunteering with VLP since 1979.

Pro bono service is a core part of Nutter's identity and reflects the legacy of firm co-founder Louis Brandeis, whose commitment to public service and equal access to justice continues to influence the firm today. Nutter has enduring partnerships with VLP's Civil Appeals Clinic, Eastern Housing Court Lawyer for the Day Clinic, and Wills Unit.

Nutter noted that working in VLP's Wills Unit particularly has had a meaningful impact on Nutter's attorneys as they are able to help clients find relief knowing their affairs and medical decisions are managed, particularly when they are facing a difficult medical situation. "It gives us a greater appreciation of the importance of access to justice for all...**Working with VLP's clients helps reminds us that at its core, our profession is about helping people solve problems,**" shared a Nutter representative. **"It demonstrates that a few hours of our time can have enormous consequences for clients with relatively modest legal issues."**

VLP looks forward to Nutter's continued participation in our programs.

Thank you, Nutter, for your commitment to VLP and our shared mission of increasing access to justice!



2026 Denis Maguire Pro Bono Awardee

Sharyn T. Sooho, Esq.



Attorney Sharyn T. Sooho has worked as a family law attorney in the Greater Boston area since her admission to the bar in January 1977, working primarily in small firm settings and, for the past couple decades, running her own small firm. Throughout her career, Sharyn has been involved in several nonprofit committees and organizations but has always felt most connected to the pro bono work that allows her to help individual clients.

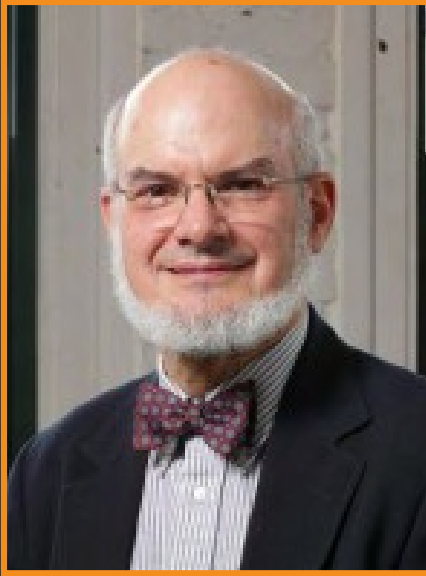
Sharyn began volunteering with VLP after being referred by the late Hon. Edward M. Ginsburg (Ret.) who "made VLP a celebration, and not just a responsibility." Sharyn's most recent case with VLP, a young single mother of three children seeking a divorce from her absent husband, has been extremely complicated and emotional, with the father refusing to cooperate and continuing to introduce new complications to the case. "The greatest challenge has been the delays and procedural obstacles serving husband," Sharyn shared. "But what keeps me going is [my] client's steadfast willingness to let the process play out, even in the most discouraging times." When asked what her greatest takeaway from this case is, Sharyn said, "I believe it is critical to provide representation to those in need of a voice and an advocate. I feel it makes a difference, even when the results are disappointing. The client knows she matters to someone."

In her free time, Sharyn enjoys visiting Martha's Vineyard, among the artists and dog lovers. As a final thought, Sharyn shared, "**No matter how busy you are, take one case. Just imagine if we all took that 'one' case. We can make a big difference collectively.**"

Thank you, Sharyn, for your dedication to VLP and our clients!

2026 Yvette C. Mendez Awardee

Dick Bauer, Esq.



Attorney Dick Bauer attended Northeastern University with the intention of pursuing a career in legal services, going on to work at several organizations including Greater Boston Legal Services, National Consumer Law Center, the Harvard Law School Tenant Advocacy Project, the Boston University Civil Litigation and Justice Program, and even VLP as a consulting attorney. Throughout his career and his time working and volunteering with VLP, Dick has been a dedicated housing advocate and appellate lawyer for VLP and other legal aid organizations throughout the state.

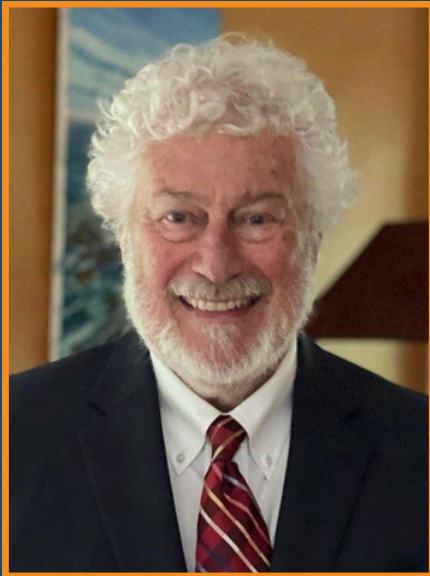
"I have spent much of my legal career working in [housing and appellate law]. Having a roof over one's head and a place to call home is one of the most basic needs for everyone," Dick explained. "While many Legal Services advocates are familiar with trial court work, appellate practice is not only highly technical but for many advocates it is not so familiar. Thus, assisting with appeals is a way that I can both indulge my inner legal nerd and add value to the work of other advocates."

Dick remains extremely motivated to continue the pursuit of access to justice, stating: "I feel incredibly lucky to have been able to make a career in Legal Services, doing work that makes a difference in the lives of people who may not have anywhere else to go. What could be more satisfying than that?"

When Dick is not volunteering, he and his wife Roberta enjoy multi-day bike rides, traveling, and spending time with their kids, grandkids, extended family, and friends. When asked to share a piece of advice, Dick shared: "**We may not win every time we fight. But if we don't fight, we can't win. So, keep fighting!**"

Thank you, Dick, for your dedication to VLP and access to justice!

2026 Judge Edward M. Ginsburg Gideon's Trumpet Awardee *The Honorable Raymond Dougan (Ret.)*

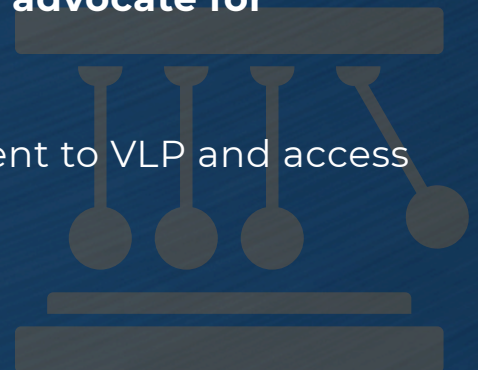


After graduating from Boston University School of Law, Hon. Raymond Dougan (Ret). worked as Assistant Attorney General in the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) of the Attorney General's Office before being promoted to Chief of the EPD. Judge Dougan was appointed to the bench in 1991 as an Associate Justice at the Boston Municipal Court (BMC).

In 2010, he served as First Justice of BMC Central, where he dedicated a weekly session on the civil side of the court to debt collection hearings, allowing VLP to represent unrepresented defendants. After his retirement in 2014, Judge Ginsburg and then Executive Director of VLP Joanna Allison asked if Judge Dougan could replicate his debt collection sessions in other courts, resulting in clinics in the small claims sessions of several municipal and district courts.

Judge Dougan has been a regular volunteer at VLP's Consumer Lawyer for the Day Clinics ever since, where he has assisted over 200 clients! He shared: "**I appreciate the opportunity these clinics give me to use legal experience and skills to advocate for unrepresented litigants.**"

Thank you, Judge Dougan, for your commitment to VLP and access to justice!



2026 Joanna Allison

Legacy of Service Awardee

Stephen (Steve) A. Russo, Esq.



This past August, Attorney Steve Russo retired from VLP after 27 years of service. Steve has worn many hats at VLP, from Director of the Eastern Region Intake Line (ERLI), to his most recent position as Medical Legal Partnership & Wills Staff Attorney. After graduating from Suffolk University Law School, Steve went on to dedicate most of his career to legal services, practicing in different fields including family and housing law. Steve notes that his desire to pursue a career in legal aid was based on his belief that legal advocacy can be life-changing.

He explained, "People look to lawyers to change things for the better, enforce what is important, and improve their lives. Legal aid helps ensure everyone is included and has a voice." Steve shared that of all his work at VLP, he is most proud of his work in ERLI and MLP/Wills, noting that both are examples of how legal services programs and VLP, in particular, find ways to fill gaps in legal services. Steve noted that working with VLP's clients has always had an impact on him, both professionally and personally. "Seeing how some clients face adversity but are determined to pursue a better life for themselves and their families is inspiring," Steve shared. "Seeing that there is always hope, the possibility of change, and the ability to make that change has improved my appreciation of life and the people I share it with."

In retirement, Steve most looks forward to exploring and experiencing the world from a different perspective, finding new ways to be helpful to others, and enjoying life. As a final word, Steve shared: **"I have met so many wonderful co-workers, students, and pro bono attorneys at VLP. Enjoy and celebrate one another!"**

Thank you, Steve, for your dedication to VLP!

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