



Public Counsel Volunteer Opportunities

Following are pro bono opportunities, both in-depth as well as limited scope, some of which can be done entirely or in large part remotely. The primary contact at Public Counsel for these matters is Pro Bono Director David Daniels, ddaniels@publiccounsel.org; you can also reach out to the project contacts identified within each opportunity below.

Limited Scope – Discrete Matters & Clinics (3 – 40 Hours)

1. ASSIST A NONPROFIT OR SMALL BUSINESS THAT HELPS LOW INCOME COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

For California-licensed attorneys with at least three years of transactional, advisory or commercial litigation experience. Businesses in high-contact sectors, such as accommodation, food services, and retail, are both most affected by COVID-19 and most likely to be minority owned. Due to the lack of generational wealth created by centuries of institutionalized racism, black- and brown-owned businesses often lack the safety nets required to absorb the dire economic impacts caused by this health crisis. The Community Development Project provides comprehensive transactional services to nonprofit organizations and small businesses that strengthen communities struggling with poverty and racism. The work ranges from assisting newly-conceived nonprofits with incorporation and tax exemption, to providing advice to established nonprofits and small start-up businesses in specific subject areas, including contracts, labor/employment, intellectual property, fundraising law, affordable housing, real estate, land use/licensing, and tax compliance. This advisory work can be handled remotely. Contact: Lilian Teran Mendoza at lteranmendoza@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** 5-25 hours

2. PROVIDE BUSINESS LAW ADVICE TO SMALL DAY CARE PROVIDERS SERVING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Child care providers offer critical early care and education services to working families with young children. Many of our child care provider clients are low-income women of color who operate child care businesses out of their home. Business lawyers can help providers draft and review contracts, form business entities, understand employment laws, navigate liability and risk questions, comply with zoning and land use regulations, review leases, etc. Public Counsel experts will provide volunteers with needed technical expertise. Interactions with clients can be conducted remotely. Contact: Lilian Teran Mendoza at lteranmendoza@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** On average, 3 to 5 hours over 2 to 3 weeks; deadlines vary.

3. VOLUNTEER FOR THE APPELLATE SELF-HELP CLINIC - SECOND DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL

For litigators interested in appellate practice who complete a one-hour training. This self-help clinic at the Court of Appeal is open Tuesdays through Thursdays for in-person appointments, or for video or telephonic consultations via Zoom. Technical support is provided by the clinic supervisor, Zoe Dolan. You will assist self-represented appellate litigants who need guidance and information about their cases, review selected documents from their court file and any applicable appellate record, and help them navigate the appellate process. This is an “information only” clinic; your work ends after you have provided brief guidance and information to the litigant at the Clinic or via video. **Contact:** Zoe Dolan at zdolan@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** Volunteers are encouraged to commit to assisting self-represented litigants for 2-3 hours at least twice each month. This assistance can be provided either on-site in the Clinic’s suite at the Court of Appeal or remotely by video, although we hope each new volunteer will spend at least one session, and



preferably two, on-site to get acquainted. Person-to-person consultation sessions (whether in-person or remote) are scheduled for up to 45 minutes. For litigants new to the Clinic, volunteers are asked to spend a few minutes after each appointment writing a short case notes entry to help us track the type of assistance we provide, for grant purposes and future reference when a litigant returns to the Clinic.

4. ASSIST AN IMMIGRANT WHO IS A SURVIVOR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR OTHER CRIME OBTAIN LAWFUL STATUS IN THE U.S. THROUGH A U VISA OR ADJUSTMENT OF STATUS APPLICATION

- a. *U Visa Representation:* For all attorneys. Assist immigrant men, women and children who are survivors of domestic violence and other serious crimes apply for and obtain lawful status and access to social services through VAWA and U Visa applications. You will undertake written advocacy and develop strong relationships with your client, the overwhelming majority of whom are persons of color whose victimization is a direct consequence of the institutionalized racism that exists both in their communities of origin and in this country. Most work can be performed remotely, including filings by mail. **Contact:** Kathleen Rivas at krivas@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** About 40 hours. Note: the time period between filing and adjudication can involve significant wait-time. Please be sure to discuss this time lag with Kathleen as part of the sign up process.

- b. *Adjustment of Status:* For all attorneys. Assist a U Visa holder obtain lawful permanent residency, or a “green card.” This enables her to travel outside of the U.S., provides additional protection from deportation, and allows her to apply for U.S. citizenship when eligible. With fear of deportation rampant in the immigrant community, this is an opportunity to help immigrant crime victims with temporary status seek more permanency in an effort to avoid the threat of separation from their loved ones. This this work can be done remotely, and filings can be handled by mail. **Contact:** Kathleen Rivas at krivas@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** About 30 hours. Petitions are adjudicated within about 18-24 months, and no hearings are required.

5. REPRESENT A VETERAN IN IMPROVING THEIR MILITARY DISCHARGE STATUS AND ABILITY TO ACCESS THE BENEFITS THEY DESERVE

For any licensed attorney or legal professional working on a team with a licensed attorney. Service members experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury often do not receive the treatment they need. As a result, their symptoms persist and are misconstrued by the military as misconduct that warrants a less than honorable discharge. These veterans are left with little or no mental health or other support. During World War II less than 15% of military veterans were people of color. Today that figure is 35%, and most have suffered under racist systems that the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed. This is an opportunity to advocate for a veteran’s discharge status to be upgraded, which opens the door to VA healthcare and benefits, removes stigma associated with the initial discharge, and increases employment opportunities. The work includes drafting client affidavits, developing supportive evidence, requesting and reviewing military and medical records, and writing an advocacy brief. The totality of this work can be done remotely, and hearings do not require a physical appearance. Public Counsel’s Center for Veterans’ Advancement Team would be happy to arrange a virtual training with a group of individuals interested in doing this work and our Team will provide all of the technical support you will need for success. If you are interested in representing a veteran in this capacity, please contact Public Counsel’s CVA Administrative Assistant at cva@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** 10 – 20 hours.



6. HELP ENSURE STABILITY FOR CHILDREN THROUGH GUARDIANSHIP

Public Counsel's Guardianship Clinic seeks to provide low-income families with access to justice by assisting friends or family of children, whose parents are either unable or unwilling to care for them, in filing applications for probate guardianship. The Clinic also assists parents or guardians with petitions for termination of guardianship, petitions for visitation, and objections to guardianship petitions. All assistance is done in pro per, meaning the Clinic does not represent the litigants. Students conduct client intake interviews, navigate the legal software used to complete the required legal forms and are educated about the court process and legal requirements so that they may explain the relevant law and procedures to litigants. Estimated time commitment: 6-8 hours per week. Contact: Ylianna Perez-Guerrero yguerrero@publiccounsel.org. Location: In person at the Skadden Arps "Pro Per" Guardianship Clinic in the Stanley Mosk Courthouse. **Time Commitment:** Varies.

7. EMPOWERING AND DEFENDING CONSUMERS: DEBT COLLECTION DEFENSE CLINICS

Remote clinic by Zoom appointment likely held two Fridays each month from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Under the guidance of Public Counsel staff, you will assist consumers in defending against debt collection lawsuits. You will help prepare responses to complaints, requests to waive court fees, discovery responses, and claims of exemptions to protect the income of consumers who are low-income. You will also provide counsel and advice related to defending cases in superior court, usually in the limited civil division. Bilingual English/Spanish attorneys are encouraged to volunteer. Contact: Elizabeth Gonzalez at egonzalez@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** 4 hours per month.

8. HELP FOSTER YOUTH RESOLVE QUALITY OF LIFE TICKETS

For California-licensed attorneys with at least two years of litigation experience; if you have less experience, a more senior attorney at your law firm or corporate legal department can supervise you. Assist current and former foster youth with traffic tickets that need to be resolved, clearing the way for youth to obtain a valid driver's license and protect youth from fines/fees they cannot afford to pay. You will receive a brief training and then be assigned an actual ticket matter. Next, you are headed to traffic court to resolve the ticket, either at the arraignment phase or if necessary, at trial. Contact: Lindsay Verity at lverity@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** About 5 hours, including the hearings; should the ticket require a trial, then possibly 7 to 10 hours.

9. COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINIC

Community Legal Clinic at the JACKIE ROBINSON COMMUNITY CENTER, PASADENA on the 2nd Saturday of the month (9 AM - 12 PM). Volunteers are asked to arrive at 8:45 AM. For all attorneys; and administrative volunteers who speak Spanish and can provide translation or assist with attorney/client matching. After conducting a brief intake, you will provide information and advice to clinic participants. We do our best to match attorneys to participants in their practice areas - depending on need, you may be matched with someone outside of your practice area to provide information or a referral under the guidance of Public Counsel attorneys. We are seeking volunteer attorneys with experience in a variety of legal areas, especially landlord-tenant law, family law, general civil litigation and bankruptcy/consumer debt. Bilingual English/Spanish volunteers (with and without a JD) are encouraged to volunteer. Contact: Kelly Evans at kevans@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** 3 hours per clinic. Coffee and breakfast items provided.



10. VOLUNTEER SPECIALISTS

Many of our litigation disputes, including those involving the rights of vulnerable women and girls of color who have been objectified and “othered,” require experts to support the theories and analysis of the case. These experts include doctors, physicians, therapists, vocational experts, accountants (CPA’s), private investigators and actuarial analysts. We are also in great need of Web Design specialists. Contact: Sandra Madera at smadera@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** Varies.

11. LANGUAGE TRANSLATORS

For all who are bilingual, particularly in Vietnamese, Tamil, Amharic, and Thai. Most of Public Counsel’s projects need translation services for client interviews & document translation. This work can be done remotely. Sign Up On Our Volunteer Translator Database: <https://goo.gl/forms/Zv2JnPFIBoY9jmK42>. **Time Commitment:** Varies.

More In-Depth Matters

12. ASSIST ASYLUM SEEKERS AT RISK OF PERSECUTION IF SENT BACK TO THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

For all attorneys. Represent asylum seekers who have been persecuted or fear persecution because of their nationality, race, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group – including claims based on gender and anti-LGBTQAI violence. Depending on the procedural posture of the case, you will prepare for and appear at a non-adversarial interview at the Asylum Office in Tustin, or trial (typically half a day) in immigration court with the opportunity to put on witnesses. Public Counsel staff provide extensive training and technical support throughout. Contact: Rachel Odio at rodio@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** Depends on the individual case, but on average 80 hours for affirmative cases that only require an interview; 150 hours for defensive cases requiring Court appearances.

13. HELP LOW-WAGE WOMEN WORKERS UNDERSTAND AND ENFORCE THEIR LEGAL RIGHTS

The Women & Girls Rights Project provides free legal assistance to women, transgender and non-binary workers in areas such as discrimination, sexual harassment, pregnancy/lactation rights, family medical leave, misclassification, and wage theft. Matters include advice and counsel, informal advocacy with employers, administrative actions, and civil litigation. WGR also provides Know Your Rights Education to workers in the community and hosts a weekly workers’ rights advice clinic (currently virtual). Please contact WGR for more information about current pro bono opportunities: wgr@publiccounsel.org. Volunteers must have background in California employment law and worker rights under FEHA. **Time Commitment:** Varies.

14. AFFIRMATIVE HOUSING RIGHTS MATTERS OR EVICTION DEFENSE CASES THAT PROTECT VULNERABLE TENANTS DURING THE HEALTH CRISIS AND BEYOND

For California licensed attorneys affiliated with a law firm that can provide the necessary litigation support. Represent vulnerable low-income tenants who are at risk of losing their housing and who face landlords represented by aggressive lawyers. Some clients will bring affirmative lawsuits to prosecute violations of fair housing laws and to protect the habitability and safety of their homes, or seek damages for illegal eviction. Other



tenants will defend against the immediate threat of eviction by their landlords. All cases offer the opportunity to gather evidence, conduct discovery and get into court. You will be provided with training and ongoing technical support by Public Counsel staff throughout. Contact: Silvana Naguib at snaguib@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** Varies but cases involving the defense of a tenant facing the immediate threat of eviction (i.e., unlawful detainer cases) are typically resolved within 6 to 8 weeks from the filing of the complaint.

15. CONSUMER FRAUD AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

For California-licensed attorneys with at least three years of experience; or, you can be supervised by a more senior attorney at your firm or company. Assist a vulnerable client who has been defrauded out of her home, personal property or life savings, or who is a debt collection case. Many cases involve bad-acting family members or unethical professionals operating independently from a prominent financial institution. Consequently, often there is not a conflict of interest problem. Most cases are filed in L.A. Superior Court and offer a rich opportunity to gain litigation experience, including client and witness interviews, strategizing and shaping the case plan, drafting and filing the complaint, propounding and responding to discovery, preparing and arguing dispositive motions, and taking the matter to trial. We hope to recruit and train a cohort of pro bono attorneys who will be available to take on discrete debt collection matters for settlement or litigation, depending on the facts. Let us know if you are interested in being part of this group. Contact: Ghirlandi Guidetti at gguidetti@publiccounsel.org
Time Commitment: Varies. **Time Commitment:** Varies.

16. REVIEW AN APPELLATE RECORD, PREPARE AN APPELLATE BRIEF, OR ARGUE A CASE BEFORE AN APPELLATE COURT

For California-licensed attorneys with at least three years of litigation experience that includes involvement in appellate brief writing. Through its Remote Appellate Self-Help Clinic, Public Counsel helps *pro se* litigants by evaluating their appeals to determine whether they are appropriate for placement with pro bono counsel, and, if so, locating counsel to handle the appeal. Litigators and appellate specialists are needed to review appellate records and provide detailed memoranda on the merits of the cases to our Clinic's Supervisor. In certain cases, the pro bono attorney may be asked to further engage in the appellate brief writing and oral argument – but that additional work is optional. The majority of this work can be handled remotely over the phone, via e-mail, and via access to court records through the internet. Public Counsel's experts can provide you with advice and support. Contact: David Daniels at ddaniels@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** Varies.

17. HELP A VETERAN SECURE DISABILITY BENEFITS FOR SERVICE-RELATED INJURIES

For any licensed attorney who is either accredited, or is willing to become accredited, by the VA. Many military veterans come home with injuries – physical and mental – as a result of their active duties. Public Counsel's Center for Veterans' Advancement (CVA) helps homeless and low-income veterans navigate the VA's complex benefits system by representing them in their applications and appeals for service-connected disability compensation. Cases involve drafting client affidavits, developing evidence of in-service injuries, requesting and reviewing military and medical records, and writing an advocacy brief. This is a great opportunity to work one-on-one with a veteran to obtain the benefits they have earned. Contact: CVA Administrative Assistant at cva@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** 40-50 hours.



18. HELP A CHILD IN FOSTER CARE BE ADOPTED INTO A PERMANENT HOME

Opportunity for a “team” of lawyers dedicated to handling adoptions from L.A. County’s foster care system. You will assist parents seeking to adopt and foster care youth who have been abused or neglected realize their dream of a permanent home for these children. The majority of these children are persons of color whose lives and circumstances have been impacted by institutional racism. Public Counsel provides comprehensive trainings and ongoing technical support throughout this process. In addition to finalizing adoptions, there is a big need for attorneys to advocate for children with special needs to obtain necessary services and the appropriate level of funding, including retroactive benefits. Much of this work, including the adoptions hearings, can be conducted remotely. Contact: Karen Ullman at kullman@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** About 20 to 30 hours per case over a 3 to 5 month period, depending on the number of children and the service/benefits advocacy. Complex benefits cases require more time.

19. IMPACT LITIGATION: PARTNER WITH PUBLIC COUNSEL’S OPPORTUNITY UNDER LAW PROJECT TO CREATE A FORCE IN THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

Public Counsel’s Opportunity Under Law program is led by nationally-recognized civil rights lawyer Mark Rosenbaum and its mission is to address causes of economic injustice in communities that are losing ground in the fight for opportunity. “We do not accept as a given that there must be underachieving schools and out of reach higher education, dead end jobs, homelessness or childhood trauma associated with poverty and the failure of our democratic institutions to strengthen families and afford meaningful opportunity,” proclaims Rosenbaum. “We do not define these conditions as legal problems, legislative conundrums or organizing goals. Rather, they are all of the above and more, calling for comprehensive, innovative strategies to reinvent and reinvigorate those institutions that are the foundation of our democracy. Economic injustice in all its forms is the civil rights issue of the 21st century.”

The creation of Opportunity Under Law dramatically expanded Public Counsel’s impact litigation program, which also develops alliances with organizations specializing in economic research and policy analysis, communications, as well as political and social action campaigns. Consistent with Public Counsel’s long history of *pro bono* collaboration, Opportunity Under Law works closely with many law firms and gifted lawyers committed to volunteering their time in support of the program’s mission. Whether you are interested in dedicating a team of litigation attorneys within your firm to partner with Opportunity Under Law in the fight for equality, or you would like to donate much needed communication, data analysis or other supportive services to further the cause, Public Counsel wants to work with you. Contact: David Daniels at ddaniels@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** Varies.

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