

Pro Bono Opportunity: Post-Conviction Relief Services for Immigrants

The need: California is home to more than 5 million residents who are non-citizen immigrants. Non-citizens with criminal records, not unlike citizens, face barriers to obtaining jobs, education, and housing. But for non-citizens of all legal statuses, interaction with the criminal justice system carries the additional threat of family separation and permanent banishment from the United States - a threat that is unknown to many individuals who plea to charges without advisement of these potential consequences.

Despite recent increased attention to “second chances” for citizens with prior convictions, there are relatively few resources available to help non-citizen Californians overcome the most significant barriers that can follow a conviction: immigration detention and deportation.

A unique pro bono opportunity: Fortunately, California has enacted unique clean slate laws that can remove the disproportionate immigration consequences of certain convictions. Attorneys volunteering with this pro bono project will have the opportunity to employ these laws to provide crucial legal services to support non-citizen community members.

How you can help: Pro bono volunteers will provide crucial legal services in three steps.

- 1. Attend a legal clinic:** Pro bono volunteers will meet with pre-screened clients at a [Organization] legal clinic. Under the supervision of [supervisors], pro bono volunteers will help clients prepare clean slate petitions for expungements and sentence reductions. This step will involve a 1-hour training video and an 4-hour clinic day.
- 2. File petition:** Pro bono attorneys will help clients properly file petitions with the appropriate county court. This step takes 2-3 hours of pro bono work. Attorneys will receive in-person training the day of the clinic and an easy-to-use reference manual to guide this step.
- 3. Attend hearing:** Pro bono attorneys will represent clients in a brief hearing in county criminal court, with the support of [mentoring organization]. Hearings typically occur 2 to 4 months after the petition is filed. Preparing for and attending a hearing takes approximately 6-8 hours, including travel to the hearing. Attorneys will receive in-person training on the clinic day and a refresher training video. A supervising attorney will be available to answer substantive questions about the process. California bar membership is required for this opportunity.

Clients who successfully alter their prior conviction will become eligible to apply for citizenship, termination of removal proceedings, or other forms of legal status previously unavailable to them, so your impact will be significant.

Skills You Will Gain:

Pro bono attorneys will receive training in working with diverse clients and relevant legal processes. They will gain client interactions skills, familiarity with filing petitions, and experience appearing in Superior Court. Impact on the client can be life-changing.