



2023 SPRING UPDATE

PRO BONO SHOUT-OUT



The VLPCNY Eviction Defense team has the pleasure of working beside Julia Martin and Jana McDonald in Landlord Tenant Court. Both pro bono attorneys provide excellent support for our community members during a very difficult and challenging time. They utilize a trauma-informed approach to advocate for our clients, negotiating behind the scenes with the tenants and landlord attorneys for the best possible outcomes. We respect their spirit of volunteerism immensely and know they make a tangible difference in the lives of those we serve. Thank you to Bousquet Holstein PLLC for believing in the mission and work of VLPCNY. Support from local firms helps us continue providing access to justice.

Congratulations to Jennifer Powell, a volunteer with the VLPCNY Immigration Program, who recently received notice that her client's asylum application was approved. Jennifer's client is a young woman from Afghanistan who was studying law before the Taliban took over the country in 2021. Jennifer's hard work on the case will allow her client to remain in safety in the U.S. and to have the freedom to pursue her dreams. Each year the NYS Bar Association proudly bestows the President's Pro Bono Service Award on individuals and entities who have rendered extraordinary pro bono service over the preceding year. This year, Jennifer was selected to receive the President's Pro Bono Service Award for the Fifth Judicial District. This recognition is well deserved. VLPCNY is grateful to the panel of supporters, like Jennifer, who have come together to provide pro bono support to immigrants in our community.



NEW YORK STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESS

VLPCNY assists low-income small business owners and entrepreneurs with starting and/or operating a business or non-profit, by:

- Forming sole proprietorships, partnerships and LLCs
- Reviewing business contracts and leases
- Employer responsibilities
- Tax implications
- 501(c)(3) formation and operations
- Advice and counsel on business-related issues

In January, staff member Pauline Smith and volunteer Anna Putintseva offered an information session to those interested in starting a food/catering business. Our team is always happy to speak with community groups interested in learning about the process.



Contact Pauline at psmith@vlpcny.org for information about the program.

Help Needed

Are you an attorney interested in helping tenants facing eviction? Did you know VLPCNY represents low-income clients in **East Syracuse Justice Court**? This program currently needs pro bono support on Tuesdays at 1:00 PM. Interested in learning more? Contact Luz Marina Zender at lzender@vlpcny.org.

Our **Talk-to-a-Lawyer Clinics** offer community members a chance to meet with a volunteer attorney at an accessible location for free legal advice and referrals. Law students and other volunteers can also assist by conducting client intake. If this is of interest to you, please contact Cheri at cblair@vlpcny.org.

Attorneys: can you help low-income clients prepare custody, child support and paternity petitions during a 3-hour time slot at the VLPCNY Family Court Clinic on Wednesdays? Contact Mary at mjohn@vlpcny.org.

SERVING IMMIGRANTS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Community members, attorneys and law students all participated in our Spring Pro Bono Immigration Symposium. Workshops were geared toward cultural competency, legal and practice skills and best practices for working with clients. VLPCNY proudly co-sponsored this event with Syracuse University College of Law, New York State Office for New Americans, Latin American Law Student Association and Syracuse Public Interest Network. Contact Grace at gzaiman@vlpcny.org to learn more about the Upstate Pro Bono Immigration Project.



**"I found myself at the office of VLP.
That is where hope started.
That is where liberation started."**

- Simphiwe Maqubela, Former VLPCNY Client and Current Board Member

"It is remarkably joyful to feel like you are part of a team working towards the same goal."

- Professor Andrew Greenberg

"This experience has been by far the most impactful thing I have done in law school."

- Giovanni Antonucci, Law Student Volunteer



TECHNOLOGY UPDATES TO BETTER SERVE CLIENTS

VLPCNY was grateful to receive technology funding from the NY Bar Foundation to expand and make easier both client scheduling for legal clinics, and matching clients for ongoing representation with pro bono attorneys. We are thankful for the partnership with NYBF and their charitable priority of ensuring New Yorkers have access to critical legal services.



ADDRESSING DEBT & EMPOWERING CONSUMERS



We are thrilled to introduce Amelia Kohli, our new Debt Program Director. Amelia will have a particular focus on launching our new Medical and Nursing Home Debt Program to empower healthcare consumers by strengthening efforts to end medical debt in CNY. Contact Amelia at akohli@vlpcny.org.

Why did you decide to pursue a career in legal services?

My driving motivation in going to law school and pursuing a legal career was my passion for social justice and desire to help people. As I learned more about the legal system, the systemic barriers that low-income and marginalized people face became more and more apparent. I decided to pursue a career in legal services because it was clear to me that not only are legal services organizations on the front lines of ensuring that access to justice is not solely dependent on wealth and status, but also because of the opportunity to work directly in the community to help chip away at those systemic barriers.

Where were you previously employed and what was your role?

I was previously employed at Legal Assistance of Western New York. I began my career there in the fall of 2013 as an Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellow, focused on representing Veterans and their families in a wide range of civil legal issues. I became a staff attorney in 2016, initially handling public benefits and housing cases, and then transitioning into LawNY's Regional Consumer Law project in 2017 where I represented consumers facing issues such as debt collection, identity theft, credit report problems, student loans, repossession, and deceptive lending practices.

How do you envision the future of the Debt Program? What are you looking forward to?

I envision a Debt Program which is centered on the needs of the community and which not only provides representation and advocacy in court, but also improves access to justice by ensuring that people have the knowledge and tools to advocate for themselves – whether it be in accessing medical care, buying a car, going to school, or just being able to take care of day-to-day expenses. I'm looking forward to working with VLPCNY clients, staff, board members, volunteer attorneys, and community partners to use all the tools at our disposal to advocate for improved access to economic justice and to further consumer protection in New York.

Anything else you'd like to add?

In my time off, I'm an avid reader and a giant poetry nerd. I'm currently working towards completing National Poetry Writing Month for the 6th consecutive year, which involves writing 30 poems in the month of April. I've also recently taken up rock climbing, which is an entirely different kind of challenge!

CONSIDER JOINING US WITH A MONTHLY GIFT

Your tax-deductible donation to the Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY, Inc. is greatly appreciated and critical to our ability to provide access to justice to those in need. Help ensure our sustainability and consider a corporate donation or sign up to make a monthly gift. Contributions of all sizes are impactful and easy to make. Join our community of donors at vlpcny.org/donate.



SAVE-THE-DATE!



ALL IN FOR EQUITY & JUSTICE



JOIN VLPCNY FOR A CASINO NIGHT
FUNDRAISER & PRO BONO CELEBRATION!

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12
ROSAMOND GIFFORD ZOO, SYRACUSE



OFFER SKILLS & EXPERTISE ATTORNEY EMERITUS PROGRAM

Did you know the New York State Unified Court System offers an “Attorney Emeritus” status for those in good standing, who are at least 55 years old, with a minimum of 10 years experience? During a two-year period, these volunteers commit to provide 60 pro bono hours of civil legal assistance under the auspices of a qualified legal service provider. VLPCNY is proud to be a host site for AEP. Contact Bethanie at bhemingway@vlpcny.org to learn more.

Visit Us Online:

vlpcny.org

*Providing access to justice through engaging the legal community
in volunteer service to those in need.*