

Pro Bono Scholars Program Information for Students

In his State of the Judiciary Address in February 2014, New York Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman introduced a new innovative program for law students interested in pro bono service - the option to participate in a Pro Bono Scholars Program. This legal education initiative enables law students to spend their final semester of law school performing pro bono service for the poor. Students participating in the program spend 12 weeks in a pro bono placement, receive academic credit, and take the New York bar examination in February rather than July. This affords students the opportunity to learn vital practice skills and accelerate their admission to the bar while helping those who are unable to afford legal representation.

The Pro Bono Scholars Program is open to students from law schools in New York and out-of-state law schools approved by the American Bar Association. Students would apply in the spring of 2024 for pro bono placements beginning in February 2025. The pro bono work could be performed in New York or in another state or country if approved by the student's law school.

Students from law schools in New York should apply for the program through the Pro Bono Coordinator at their law school. Out-of-state law schools that are interested in having their students participate in the program should contact the Program's Executive Director, Mindy Jeng at probonoscholars@nycourts.gov for more information about the program.

Law schools have an integral role in approving students for the program, designing and providing the academic component, approving the placement, and assisting with evaluations. Students also must be approved by the court system for participation in the program. Law schools are encouraged to hold an informational session about the program early in the calendar year.

Current second-year law students who are interested in the program should consult with their law school advisor in the fall or winter for information about the program. It is important for interested students to take all of the courses necessary for graduation no later than the fall semester of their third year of law school.

Further information about the Pro Bono Scholars Program is set forth below. In addition, there is more detailed information in the Pro Bono Scholars Program Guide and Placement Guide, both of which are on the website at www.nycourts.gov/probonoscholars.

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What Type of Work Will Qualify?

Placements may be provided through a law school's existing or newly created in-house clinic, hybrid clinic, or externship clinic. Placements also may be provided through legal services providers, law firms, corporations, governmental agencies, and the courts. Pro bono service must be full-time, supervised law-related work that assists in the provision of legal services for identifiable clients. This includes pro bono work for:

- persons who are financially unable to pay for legal representation;
- not-for-profit legal service providers that predominantly address the legal needs of indigent clients where the work performed is for such clients; or
- a governmental entity, if the work performed is on behalf of identifiable individuals who are financially unable to afford representation or whose unmet legal needs prevent their access to justice.

Who is Participating in the PBSP?

During the tenth year of the program, over 180 students from all 15 New York law schools and four out-of-state law schools from around the country participated in the Pro Bono Scholars Program. Students are permitted to perform their pro bono work in another state or country if approved to do so by their law school.

What are the Requirements for Participation in the Program?

Students participating in the Program must be willing to devote their final semester of law school to pro bono work in an approved program and to take the bar exam in February. Specific student requirements follow.

- Students will complete 5 semesters of law school prior to the start of the program, be in good academic standing, need no more than 12-15 academic credits for the final semester, and comply with ABA and law school graduation requirements.
- Students will apply to the law school for participation in the PBSP and meet the requirements of the PBSP and any additional requirements established by the law school. The law school has discretion to approve applications that it deems appropriate. The law school will forward approved applications to the Executive Director of the PBSP for final review and acceptance into the program.
- Up to 42.5 hours of the program may be completed during the fall semester immediately preceding the student's final semester of law school study. Credit for such work is not awarded until the entire program is completed.
- Students will work full-time for 12 weeks during the spring semester in an approved pro bono program and complete the academic requirements of the program for a total of 45 hours per week.
- Students will spend most of their time providing pro bono legal services directly to indigent clients, e.g., work on legal issues and assignments, client matters, legal research and development of practical legal skills. The remainder of the student's time will be spent meeting other academic requirements and incidental administrative matters. No time may be spent on fee generating matters.

- Students will be supervised by a placement supervisor and law school faculty member and will complete all of the training, reporting, and academic requirements agreed upon at the commencement of the placement.

What are Some Examples of Qualifying Placements?

Examples of the type of placements that are acceptable under the PBSP follow. Externships or field placements with a:

- not-for-profit provider of legal services for the poor and low-income individuals;
- law firm, if the pro bono work is full-time and will involve pro bono matters being handled by that firm and the pro bono client(s) are not paying legal fees;
- legal aid organization or other similar civil or criminal legal services organization that serves low-income clients;
- public defender, conflict defender, or other similar criminal defense service organization that serves indigent criminal defendants;
- corporation providing pro bono legal assistance through its in-house legal department to individuals who are unable to afford legal representation and are not paying legal fees;
- U.S. Attorney, District Attorney or State Attorney General, if providing assistance to litigants or victims who otherwise would not be able to afford legal representation;
- court, if assistance is for litigants who otherwise would not be able to afford legal representation.

Law-related work for a not-for-profit organization that:

- provides free civil legal services for low-income individuals;
- provides criminal legal services for the indigent; or
- serves the poor or disadvantaged or otherwise promotes access to justice.

Law school-sponsored clinics that:

- provide legal assistance to those who cannot afford representation.

What is the Timeline for the Program?

January-April 2024: Law schools will hold an information session about the PBSP.

May – September 2024: Interested students will submit applications (law schools will determine what information is required), resume, transcript, and writing sample to the law school by the deadline set by the school and, once approved, work with the law school faculty member to identify an appropriate placement.

June-September 2024: Students will work with the law school faculty member to identify an appropriate placement.

August - September 17, 2024: Law school will approve placement and send the application and materials to the PBSP for final acceptance into the Program.

September 30, 2024: Final deadline for law student and provider to commit to participate in the PSBP.

September – December 2024: Students may complete up to 42.5 hours of the program if permitted by their law school and/or placement site.

October 1-31, 2024: Selected students will submit their application to take the February bar exam.

February 25-26, 2025: Students will take the bar exam.

March 3, 2025 – May 23, 2025: Students will work full-time in their pro bono placements.