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New York Courts Wins 2015 Legaltech Innovation Award

Program Assisting Domestic Violence Victims Winner, *Innovative Use of Technology in a Pro Bono Project*

New York, NY (July 15, 2015) – Each year, thousands of Family Offense Petitions are filed in New York State Courts by individuals seeking to protect themselves from abuse with an order of protection. Domestic violence has serious ramifications and victims need advice and information to stay safe. To reduce barriers for those seeking protection from abuse, last year, the New York Courts' Access to Justice Program and the NYC Family Court, worked with the Center for Court Innovation, Domestic Violence Advocate Groups and Pro Bono Net to launch the Advocate Family Offense Petition Program. This initiative was recognized with the *Innovative Use of Technology in Pro Bono Project* award at Legal Tech West in San Francisco Tuesday, the premiere legal technology event of the year.

"Pro Bono Net nominated the New York courts for this prestigious honor because they have pioneered a use of technology that allows thousands of domestic violence survivors to better access critical services and support under the most difficult circumstances," said Pro Bono Net Executive Director Mark O'Brien. "Pro Bono Net is proud to support the Courts in this effort."

In conjunction with the release of the Advocate Family Offense Petition Program, the Courts have trained domestic violence advocates throughout New York State on how to help litigants use the online document assembly interview to complete petitions. Petitions can be completed from any location and the information is securely transferred into the Family Court's Universal Case Management System (UCMS). After a successful pilot in Bronx Family Court the initiative went statewide in early 2014. By the end of 2014, petitions had been electronically filed in 45 of New York's 62 counties. A total of 5,091 petitions were filed in 2014, and there have been more than 3,000 filings in the first six months of 2015.

"By designing systems where data is entered once and then passed along electronically instead of repeatedly reentering it, we can reduce the overall clerical burden and free court staff to spend more time assisting litigants and less time handling paper," said Chip Mount, Director of Court Research and Technology.

Traditionally, litigants seeking an Order of Protection had to travel to court and often wait for long periods of time to meet with a clerk, who manually recorded information. The process was draining for litigants, who were already dealing with stressful circumstances. The new approach revolutionized the filing process, helping victims feel more in control of their case. It also streamlines court processes and allows clerks to quickly review petitions.

"This exciting project is a great example how collaborative efforts between the domestic violence community, justice community and courts can lead to greater access to justice for unrepresented litigants," says the Honorable Fern A. Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts and Director the NYS Courts Access to Justice Program. "Thanks to the technology, court staff

are able to help litigants easily and efficiently, allowing individuals who experience domestic violence greater access to services.”

The project leverages LawHelp Interactive (LHI), a national online document assembly service that provides support to access to justice initiatives by legal services, court, pro bono, and law school programs in more than 40 states. LHI is operated by Pro Bono Net, in partnership with Ohio State Legal Services, and together they have received generous support for this work from the Legal Services Corporation's Technology Initiative Grants program, as well as from the HotDocs Corporation. Using HotDocs™ online document generation software allows advocates to conduct an intake and prepare petitions, quickly, easily and accurately. By integrating Pro Bono Net's LHI program with the court system's case management system, the Courts are making the justice system more accessible for litigants who are seeking critical support under the most difficult circumstances.

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About Pro Bono Net

Pro Bono Net is a national non-profit organization, founded 15 years ago, dedicated to increasing access to justice for the disadvantaged. Through innovative technology solutions and expertise in building and mobilizing justice networks, Pro Bono Net transforms the way legal help reaches the underserved. Today, we work with a broad network of access-to-justice partners to close the justice gap. Our comprehensive programs, including www.probono.net, www.lawhelp.org and www.lawhelpinteractive.org, enable legal advocates to make a stronger impact, increase volunteer participation, and empower the public with resources and self-help tools to improve their lives. For more information, visit www.probono.net.