Urgent Need for Pro Bono Assistance for Detained Immigrants and Refugees in South Texas

South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR)

"ProBAR's efforts serve as an inspiration for interested attorneys to take a week off and go to the Rio Grande Valley to help."
– Kelly Frels, President of the State Bar of Texas

"ProBAR is the model for immigration programs throughout the country. It is an excellent example of how lawyers are effecting tremendous change with very few resources."
– Richard Pena, Past President of the State Bar of Texas

The Department of Homeland Security detains thousands of individuals in South Texas each year. Many are asylum seekers fleeing persecution, who have little hope of prevailing in Immigration Court if they are unable to secure pro bono legal representation. The South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR), located in Harlingen, TX, was founded in 1989 to provide much-needed assistance to detained immigrants and refugees seeking relief such as asylum, cancellation of removal, and withholding of removal.

As a joint project of the American Bar Association, the State Bar of Texas, and the American Immigration Lawyers Association, ProBAR recruits and trains volunteers to provide assistance to the project's clients in a variety of ways. Traditionally, pro bono attorneys from around the country commit to traveling to ProBAR on certain dates for one week or more, and the ProBAR Coordinator schedules a case during that period. Many law firms send summer associates and other attorneys to ProBAR because it provides a very unique opportunity for them to prepare a case from beginning to end, while gaining hands-on courtroom and client experience. No previous immigration experience is required. ProBAR provides housing for volunteers, and covers expenses up to $500 for first-time attorney or law graduate volunteers. ProBAR volunteer Brett Schuman, from Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, LLP writes:

"I have been working with ProBAR since 1995, and, since 1997, have been part of a program that sends summer associate attorneys to Harlingen to handle asylum cases for ProBAR clients. Part of what makes ProBAR special -- we also work with many local pro bono referral associations here in SF -- is the extraordinary commitment and dedication of Meredith Linsky. Each summer, when I take the summer associates to Texas, I am reminded of this, and it is what keeps us coming back. The cases are always interesting, and Meredith is very easy and accommodating to the outside counsel she recruits for them."

If one is not able to travel to ProBAR, it is also possible to assist by drafting administrative and/or federal court appeals.

The Department of Homeland Security continues to detain more and more individuals, and volunteer attorneys are desperately needed to make a difference in their lives. Without the dedication and commitment of its volunteers, ProBAR would be unable to serve the needs of its clients, and many would be forced to return home to face abuses such as human trafficking, domestic violence, torture, or death. Providing pro bono assistance to detained immigrants and refugees is an unparalleled opportunity to serve the community, and to advocate for the most vulnerable members of our society.
Attorneys, paralegals, accredited representatives, and law students are all encouraged
to donate their time. If interested, please contact Meredith Linsky, ProBAR’s
Coordinator, at (956) 425-9231 or probar@sbcglobal.net.

For more information about ProBAR, please see below:

Article in the Texas Bar Journal, February 2004

American Bar Association, Commission on Immigration

Summer on the Border, Legal Times, August 2, 2004, by Karen Grisez

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