

The Art of Public Service: Pro Bono Assistance for Low-Income Artists

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In late March, Proskauer hosted a virtual clinic with [Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts \(VLA\)](#) to provide legal consultations for low-income artists. VLA holds a special place in the hearts of Proskauer attorneys, especially given that [Proskauer associates](#) founded VLA in 1969. One of the artists that my team advised at the clinic is a young filmmaker who was navigating collaboration agreements for the first time. It was both enjoyable to speak with the client about their goals for the film project, and rewarding to raise questions and offer suggestions for how they could protect their creative and financial interests going forward. The client gained a critical understanding of what was important to memorialize in their contracts and relationships to ensure that their project would be successful and free from disputes.

I volunteered at the VLA clinic because my own love of the arts played a large role in my childhood. I grew up performing in musicals and taking voice and piano lessons. In college, I realized I did not want to pursue a career as a performer and became interested in law school with the hope that I could one day represent and advocate for artists as a lawyer. I saw the value in bringing my personal passion, experience, and understanding of art to that legal representation. Then I found a dual-degree program at Columbia University where I could pursue a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Theatre Management & Producing at the same time as a law degree. Through the MFA program, I took courses in theatre management, producing, accounting, budgeting, and contract drafting for producers. I knew that studying the business of theatre would better prepare me to serve clients in the arts when the opportunity arose.

Thankfully, I didn't have to wait long. The first project I worked on as a Proskauer summer associate in 2019 was a pro bono matter through VLA. I worked with two corporate associates to help an author license the underlying rights in her book to a playwright who wanted to write a musical adaptation. In just my second week of the summer program, I was working directly with the client and drafting provisions of a rights agreement. Our client was being offered below-market terms by the other party's agent, and without the assistance of lawyers through VLA, our client likely would have accepted them. Instead, we were able to secure more favorable terms for the client that were standard in the theatre industry. The experience was extremely rewarding and also cemented for me the importance of the work VLA does for those in need.

Artists are often put in positions where they have to negotiate but do not know exactly what position to take or what their true value is; other times, they are negotiating against a party with significantly more industry knowledge and leverage. This is where pro bono representation is most needed and most impactful, and why I look forward to many more opportunities to help artists in need.

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