

# The Importance of Assigning Pro Bono Matters to First-Year Associates

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Of all the strategies we employ to increase pro bono engagement, there is one that – by any measure – rises above the rest. Indeed, it is the only policy I can recall that prompts people to come by my office or, more recently, reach out to me over Zoom, just to say thanks. In keeping with a longstanding Proskauer tradition, we have just assigned pro bono matters to all incoming first-year associates.

Thus far, 53 associates have been assigned to 80+ new and existing matters. Cases include:

- Immigration
- Criminal record sealing
- Transactional and employment assistance to low-income artists, small businesses, and nonprofit organizations
- Representation of special needs children in mediation for disability-related services, accommodations, and school placement
- Disability benefits and discharge upgrade representation for veterans
- Impact litigation in the areas of racial/disability/environmental justice

Assigning pro bono matters to first-years as they start sends a strong message that pro bono work is important and valued by the firm. It also helps develop good work habits since those who take on pro bono matters as first-years are more likely to do pro bono work throughout their careers. Often it takes a little time for first-years to ramp up their billable work, meet new people, and become acclimated to the firm's resources. Through pro bono work, an associate can get experience working with colleagues, managing cases and helping clients in great need immediately. In addition, this work is enormously popular among the first-years, and it has a positive effect on the firm as a whole: prioritizing public service fosters collegiality and strengthens the bonds we have with each other by providing a sense of common purpose.

[Bethany Johnson](#), a Boston Corporate Associate, started at Proskauer in October and was immediately given two pro bono assignments: a research project on gun safety laws for a non-profit organization and a naturalization application for a client who fled to the United States several years ago out fear of persecution over his sexual orientation. “My projects allowed me to get started on hands-on legal work immediately,” said Bethany. “This helped me connect with the firm outside of my department and also connected me to the ‘real world.’”

Like Bethany, [Briana Seyarto Flores](#), a Litigation Associate in Los Angeles, appreciates the opportunity to make a difference in people’s lives. She joined Proskauer with an interest in immigration work which she was able to pursue beginning with her first week. Since then she has worked on a voting rights case as well as a matter on behalf of a disabled veteran. In discussing these matters, she emphasized the “opportunity to serve others and engage in deeply fulfilling work.” She also said, “It has provided me opportunities to meet more people, familiarize myself with firm resources, and refine my research and writing skills.”

For [Jason Finger](#), a New York Corporate Associate, pro bono work can be “addictive. It’s no secret that law school gives you a limited view, and we are increasingly specialized into practice silos, which can make it difficult to see the breadth of impact we can have.” Jason noted the variety of pro bono matters he is working on, which include an asylum case and the review of an agreement for a small museum. He also observed, “I have already experienced four different areas of law. It is important to assign first-years a pro bono matter because once the pro bono ball gets moving it’s difficult to stop.”

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