

Pro Bono Corner

Appearing Pro Bono Publico

By Patrick Reilly

I hesitated before clicking the “send” button on that email where I agreed to accept a case for the Federal Pro Bono Pilot program. My father was a cop, and I definitely grew up in a law and order family. It was a leap of faith for me to represent not just a convicted felon, but a convicted murderer. For hire. Even if it was a civil case.

The Federal Pro Bono Pilot program is relatively new. It is designed to provide representation to pro se litigants in civil cases in federal court. Typical cases include employment discrimination, real estate, first amendment issues, non-criminal prisoner issues, and race/religious discrimination. Any Magistrate Judge or District Judge may refer a pro se individual to the program. Cases from the Northern District are referred to Washoe Legal Services; cases from the Southern District to Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada. Since the program’s inception in the fall of 2014, volunteer attorneys in the south have been appointed on fifteen cases.

The program not only preserves access to justice to those who need it most but it has also been a great professional experience for me, and an eye-opening one at that. Legal Aid Center has been incredibly supportive and has done a great job in launching the new program. I am assigned to a legitimate prisoner civil rights case with real merit. My client—who I actually like more than some of my paying clients—deserves real redress for the way he was mistreated. Not only am I getting to work in an area of law that I would never ordinarily see, I know we are genuinely helping someone who needs it.

By the way, the “we” includes Andrea Champion, a Holland & Hart associate who has done an amazing job getting this case ready for trial.

Best of all, when I make an appearance in court, I confess that I stand a little taller when announcing myself, “Pat Reilly appearing pro bono publico for...”

Patrick Reilly, a partner with Holland and Hart, is an experienced commercial litigator, trial advocate, and appellate lawyer. To learn more about the Federal Pro Bono Pilot Program and other volunteer opportunities with Legal Aid Center, contact Pro Bono Project Director, Melanie Kushnir, at mkushnir@lacs.nv.gov.



Marketplace

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