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Pro Bono Net Celebrates 10th Anniversary

Pro Bono Net's 10th anniversary was marked with a dinner in New York on Sept. 15. Gara LaMarche, President and CEO of The Atlantic Philanthropies, spoke about Pro Bono Net and his role in its creation when he was at the Open Society Institute.

Partner Profile: Minnesota Legal Services Coalition

In honor of Pro Bono Net's 10th anniversary, we profile the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition, one of our first partners outside New York. PBN spoke with MLSC Director Maureen O'Connell and Staff Attorney John Freeman.

Law Firm Fellows/Deferred Associates Can Find Resources Online

Hundreds of deferred would-be associates working as fellows and externs with legal services, public service and government organizations now have access to a dedicated online resource: www.probono.net/fellows.

KPMG, LexisNexis Offer Services, Training to PBN Members

Two of Pro Bono Net's corporate sponsors, KPMG and LexisNexis, are donating their time and expertise this fall to help pro bono and legal aid advocates.

Read All About Us!

LawHelp and other PBN programs have been in the news lately, including a mention by ABC News and coverage of new online court forms in New York.

What's New At Pro Bono Net

Pro Bono Net is pleased to welcome two new board members, as well as a new AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer. Plus, baby news!

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*Pro Bono Net celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a dinner on Sept. 15 in New York. The evening brought together many Pro Bono Net partners and supporters from around the country, including legal aid and public interest organizations, law firms, courts, funders and corporate sponsors. We thank all those who joined us to help mark the occasion.*

*It was particularly rewarding to hear the evening's speakers describe how Pro Bono Net has heightened the impact of their own work. Speakers included Phyllis Holmen, Executive Director of [Georgia Legal Services Program](#); Hon. Fern Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge of New York State and Director of the [New York State Courts' Access to Justice Program](#); and Michael Cooper, of Counsel at [Sullivan & Cromwell](#) and Pro Bono Net's Board Chair.*

*We were very pleased to have as our primary speaker Gara LaMarche, President and CEO of [The Atlantic Philanthropies](#). Gara was previously Vice President and Director of U.S. Programs at the [Open Society Institute](#), which provided Pro Bono Net with crucial early support at the point when it was still an idea dreamed up by co-founders Michael Hertz and Mark O'Brien. Gara and Catherine Samuels, then Director of OSI's Program on Law and Society, championed the idea of Pro Bono Net and helped it come to fruition.*

*An edited version of Gara's remarks is below.*

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It seems to me that what this is basically about is the insight George Soros had a dozen or thirteen years ago, which Catherine Samuels and I helped him implement, that the infrastructure of justice in the United States is in disrepair, and needs repair just as much as the physical infrastructure. Legal services, representation for indigent people, the quality of the federal judiciary, a whole panoply of things. We made a series of investments, of which this was a key one, to try to help repair that infrastructure, and now we need to take that forward.

I think Pro Bono Net is a great example of a kind of grant that brings together a number of things. It is not so much an advocacy organization itself as a place that helps people who are advocates achieve their goals. So it has links to communities like immigrant rights and human rights and others, but it is not itself an advocacy group.

It is one of the early groups making intelligent, farsighted use of technology to advance social change. Many others have followed but Pro Bono Net has been a real pioneer.

It's an open source situation, it's a platform for a lot of people to use. It's accessible to people, it means to be used by a lot of people, and for that reason it fosters something that we see too little of even now in the nonprofit and social change world, and that is collaboration of people across issues and silos.

It not only fosters collaboration, it also fosters the best of a volunteer tradition and



the whole tradition of national service that you see now embodied in the bill that the president signed a few months ago [the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which is designed to strengthen national community service efforts by boosting federal funding for thousands of volunteers in a variety of areas]. Pro Bono Net and the lawyers in this room who devote their time to advancing justice through pro bono work are very much in that very proud and honorable tradition. All those things come together here.

The only thing I want to say by way of conclusion is that it does take money. I wasn't brought here to make a pitch and I'm not making a pitch. But I do want to say that while Pro Bono Net has its business plan that we helped to spur and that [the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation] and others did, which is a very smart way of mixing up the revenue sources, it will always need, I think, [private support](#). It will always need foundations.

There are few foundations that are about social justice - too few, more all the time we hope. But there are a lot of foundations and individual donors who share an interest in the broad things I've just talked about: collaboration, the best ideas, people coming together to make a better world. I am proud of the role that OSI played when I was there and since in helping Pro Bono Net out of the delivery room and into toddlerhood and [beyond]. I'm proud of that role, but we're not going to be able to take it to the next 10 years unless people step up.

So answer Michael's plea for other firms, other sources of people who might be able to provide financial support. Because I think this tremendous experiment that is now a living, breathing, thumping reality can only get better, but it will get better only if we all help it do so. Thank you very much.

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As the foreclosure crisis heated up, Minnesota’s Volunteer Lawyers Network (VLN) was prepared with hundreds of resources to help pro bono and legal aid attorneys working on foreclosure defense and equity stripping cases. But with access to the material the responsibility of a VLN staff attorney, distributing it was inefficient, to say the least. The solution? [ProJusticeMN.org](http://ProJusticeMN.org), Minnesota’s statewide advocate site.

VLN approached [Minnesota Legal Services Coalition](http://Minnesota Legal Services Coalition) (MLSC), which coordinates ProJusticeMN, and they partnered to create a [Real Estate practice area](http://Real Estate practice area) on the site. “It’s been very successful,” said Maureen O’Connell, Director at MLSC, who oversees ProJusticeMN.

“It couldn’t be a better fit both in terms of the technical capability of organizing resources but also in terms of the partnership between legal aid and pro bono attorneys,” she added.



John Freeman and Maureen O'Connell

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Partnerships have always played a significant role in ProJusticeMN, which was the first Probono.net site to launch outside of New York, in 2000. The site was developed as a joint project of MLSC – itself a coalition of seven regional legal aid programs – and the Minnesota State Bar Association.

As much as a decade ago, MLSC and the State Bar were looking for ways that technology could help improve service delivery and reduce costs. Nancy Kleeman, former Access to Justice Director at the State Bar, heard Pro Bono Net co-founder Michael Hertz describe the Probono.net model at a conference.

“Before he even finished speaking I got up and made sure I was the first person to talk to him,” said Nancy, who now works with nonprofits to help them achieve their social justice mission. “It fit perfectly with the structure in Minnesota of working statewide and the interest in using technology.”

Today ProJusticeMN has upwards of 2,000 members, and continues to grow. “The tools really help us respond to new and emerging issues that our clients face and give us a way to approach those collaboratively with legal and non-legal organizations,” said John Freeman, Staff Attorney at MLSC, who does much of the day-to-day work on ProJusticeMN and

[LawHelpMN.org](http://LawHelpMN.org).

LawHelpMN.org is “used a great deal by low-income people and as a resource by attorneys looking at a new area or helping people find resources to help explain the basics of the law,” John says. The site recently received attention when it launched a [Somali-language version](#). Minnesota has the largest population of Somali speakers in the United States, so legal aid organizations in the state had already translated a fair amount of material. A grant from a local Bar Foundation paid for further translation, and MLSC staff used the LawHelp program site to create the new site.

MLSC continues to look for ways that technology and collaboration can further its mission. The state was an early adopter of LiveHelp, Pro Bono Net’s real-time chat support service, which helps LawHelp users navigate the site. MLSC is now working to develop multimedia material for low-literacy LawHelp users, in English as well as other languages.

Another innovation is an online advice project now under development, where those with legal problems can receive advice online from volunteer attorneys. Ideally, this will one day be something that users can reach from the LawHelpMN site. “It has a lot of promise for early intervention into legal problems,” John said.

MLSC is also partnering with courts and other organizations to create online forms using Pro Bono Net’s LawHelp Interactive online document assembly service. The initial focus was on forms for domestic abuse and divorce, and expansion into others such as power of attorney and healthcare directives is underway.

The newest initiative on ProJusticeMN is the creation of resources around expungement, in partnership with VLN and the Council on Crime & Justice, another Minnesota nonprofit. “This is an issue that impacts our clients across all legal topics,” John said. Since a complex set of pleadings and materials is involved, having the website as a framework is crucial, he added.

“Overall, we’re really trying to focus on projects that will draw both legal aid and private attorneys to the site,” Maureen said. “It’s a really exciting time. Now that we’ve got some tools, how can we use them to address unmet needs?”

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This fall, hundreds of would-be associates who had their law firm start dates deferred will be working as fellows and externs with legal services, public service and government organizations. In order to help these recent law grads and junior law firm associates become a part of the legal services community and to give them a chance to reflect on the experience, Pro Bono Net has launched an online resource, [probono.net/fellows](http://probono.net/fellows).

Developed with support from the New York Community Trust, the site will be an online complement to the city-wide training program administered by the City Bar Justice Center and available to any law firm fellow in the New York City area.

The site includes a range of resources to help ease the transition to legal services, educate fellows on poverty law, create interest around "Civil Gideon" and a civil right to counsel, and to allow fellows to share their experiences and voices with other fellows and with the greater community. Tools featured on [probono.net/fellows](http://probono.net/fellows) include a calendar of events and trainings, news, a library of training videos and resources, extensive links to other resources, and a listserv. A blog, updated monthly by fellows sharing their experiences, is in development

Among the resources now available is an [on-demand webinar](#), "Public Interest Perspectives: An Introductory Training for Private Attorneys in Public Interest Placements," which was conducted by The Association of Pro Bono Counsel (APBCO) and the Association for Legal Career Professionals (NALP). It provides an overview of the differences in law firm and nonprofit practice settings, insight on working with low-income clients and background on the economic challenges faced by the public interest community.

Although the idea for an online resource began primarily as a resource for New York fellows, the reach and impact of deferrals make this a relevant resource for fellows all over the country. In addition to the City Bar Justice Center, other contributors include the New York Immigration Coalition, The Legal Aid Society, the DC Bar Pro Bono Program, the Public Interest Law Initiative, The Public Interest Clearinghouse and Legal Aid Association of California, the Association of Pro Bono Counsel, NALP, and Equal Justice Works.

All law firm attorneys working at legal services, public service or government organizations for a fellowship, externship, or term of volunteer service can get involved by registering at [www.probono.net/fellows](http://www.probono.net/fellows).

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David A. Heiner, Vice President & Deputy General Counsel at [Microsoft](#), and Edward J. Walters, CEO of Fastcase, have joined Pro Bono Net's Board of Directors. David heads up two organizations within Microsoft's legal corporate affairs department, its Interoperability Group and its Antitrust Group. He is a strong supporter of pro bono and other volunteer efforts within Microsoft's legal and corporate affairs department. His own recent pro bono efforts include work with Volunteer Advocates for Immigrant Justice to obtain asylum in two cases for immigrants from east Africa.

Ed is co-founder as well as CEO of [Fastcase](#), an online legal research software company based in Washington, D.C. Prior to founding Fastcase he worked at Covington & Burling in Washington and Brussels. He also worked in the White House from 1991-1993, in the Office of Media Affairs and then in the Office of Presidential Speechwriting.

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In staff news, Stephanie Lin joined us in July through the AmeriCorps\*VISTA Digital Arts Service Corps program. She is supporting Pro Bono Net's immigration initiatives, including the Immigration Advocates Network. She previously worked with the Alameda Labor Council and the Bus Project. Stephanie graduated in 2007 with a degree in Public Policy Analysis from Pomona College. She can be reached at [slin@probono.net](mailto:slin@probono.net).

We also said farewell to New York Program Coordinator Tory Messina, who has moved back to her native Philadelphia to become Associate Director of Pro Bono and Public Interest Programs at University of Pennsylvania Law School.

Micah Jalloh, our LiveHelp Americorps\*VISTA volunteer, received the Montana Legal Services Association's Building Blocks award in October in recognition of his community-building efforts at MLSA. Micah is based in Helena, MT.

As usual, Pro Bono Net staff have been traveling to various conferences and speaking engagements. Mark O'Brien spoke at the [Pro Bono Students Canada](#) launch event at Osgoode Hall Law School in Ontario in September, and at a regional pro bono summit at the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association in early October. Claudia Johnson and Tom Crowe traveled to Denver for the [National Center for State Courts' Court Technology Conference](#) in September. You can [see video](#) of a panel Claudia participated in on "Technology that Enables Self-Help Centers." Liz Keith spoke at the University of Michigan on Nov. 6 on "Increasing Access to Justice Through Technology-Enabled Collaboration and Volunteer Participation."

Pro Bono Net staff will be participating in several panels at the [NLADA Annual Conference](#) Nov. 18-21. [Click here for specifics.](#)

Finally, we are very excited to welcome the newest member of the Pro Bono Net "family." Emily McDermott Colten, the second daughter of Deputy Director Allison McDermott, was born July 14 in New York. Allison recently returned from family leave.

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## Welcome to MyFax, Our Newest Sponsor!

[MyFax](#) has signed on as the newest member of Pro Bono Net's corporate sponsorship program.

Sponsorship of Pro Bono Net provides companies with opportunities to connect with more than 55,000 attorneys and other advocates who make up the organization's membership, while providing crucial support to Pro Bono Net's mission of increasing access to justice.

"For years, legal professionals have relied on MyFax to securely transmit sensitive documents, while enhancing mobility, productivity and efficiency," said Joseph Nour, CEO of [Protus](#), the provider of MyFax. "MyFax is excited to support Pro Bono Net's efforts."

MyFax allows law professionals and their clients to send, receive, store or forward faxes securely without fax machines, dedicated fax/phone lines, long distance phone charges or fax modems. Subscribers can access their fax communications from anywhere, the same way they access their e-mail. Faxes can be received as PDF's and users have unlimited storage of faxes online.

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To learn more about MyFax, please see [www.myfax.com/probono](http://www.myfax.com/probono).

MyFax joins other PBN sponsors, including ALM, Epiq Systems, KPMG, LawScribe and LexisNexis.

For more information about PBN sponsorship opportunities, [contact Pam Weisz](#).

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