

# AILA's Pro Bono Newsletter

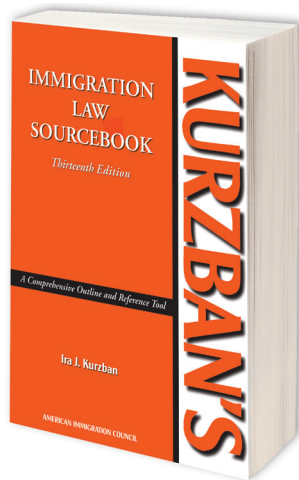
Pro Bono Is a Part of Professionalism ■  
AILA Practice and Professionalism Center



Summer 2012  
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**GET INVOLVED TODAY!** Help defend DREAMs and keep military families together through AILA's marquis pro bono programs [DREAM Defenders \(AD2\)](#) and [Military Assistance Program \(MAP\)](#). These dynamic national programs offer many opportunities to take on unique cases while representing deserving and inspiring pro bono clients. Contact [probono@aila.org](mailto:probono@aila.org) for more information.

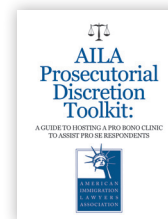


## First Prosecutorial Discretion Clinic a Success!

by Sabrina Balgamwalla

**O**n March 24, AILA's DC Chapter hosted the first prosecutorial discretion clinic in cooperation with the [Foreign-Born Information and Referral Network \(FIRN\)](#) in Columbia, Maryland. This community clinic was AILA's response to the prosecutorial discretion pilot at the Baltimore Immigration Court that began at the end of 2011, and AILA's concern that *pro se* individuals were generally not aware of their eligibility for prosecutorial discretion or other relief.

FIRN was a natural partner for AILA in this endeavor. The organization has served the immigrant community in Central Maryland for more than 20 years. Currently, its legal services division is anchored by one attorney, Alexis Downs, and one BIA-accredited representative, Pedro Reyes. Alexis, Pedro, and FIRN volunteers



**Kudos to Susan Timmons of AILA's Practice and Professionalism Center, who developed the [Prosecutorial Discretion Toolkit](#) used at the event.**

conducted community outreach and assisted with logistics and interpretation on the day of the clinic. Most of the clinic attendees learned about the event through direct contact from FIRN. Outreach materials indicated that the clinic was specifically for individuals in removal proceedings.

On the day of the clinic, community members met with volunteer attorneys, who performed a two-tier screening process to determine eligibility for both prosecutorial discretion and independent immigration relief. Individuals deemed eligible for relief were given a list of local AILA attorneys who volunteered to take low-income clients

on a sliding scale or pro bono basis. Two students from the University of Baltimore School of Law assisted with intake, and more than 20 AILA members volunteered to assist either with intake on the day of the clinic or with referrals for full representation.

Out of 10 cases reviewed, six individuals were screened as eligible for prosecutorial discretion. Three of these individuals were eligible for some other kind of relief, including asylum and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. These numbers clearly indicate that the community is still not aware of the prosecutorial discretion program and lack access to legal resources.

*Sabrina Balgamwalla is a Teaching Fellow with the Immigrant Rights Clinic at the University of Baltimore School of Law. She served as the 2011-12 Chair of AILA-DC Chapter's Community-Based Organizations Committee.*

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AILA InfoNet Doc. No. 12070950. (Posted 07/9/12)

## Spotlight ▶



**Madhu Sharma**  
Stone & Grzegorek LLP  
Los Angeles, California

# Sharma Named 2011 Juceam Pro Bono Advocate

Immigration law firm [Stone & Grzegorek LLP](#) has named Madhu Sharma as the law firm's 2011 Juceam Pro Bono Advocate. Named in honor of Robert Juceam, who was awarded American Lawyer's 2010 Lifetime Achiever for his "extraordinary commitment to meet the legal needs of the less fortunate in dire circumstances," the Juceam Pro Bono Advocate recognizes standout attorneys who are contributing free legal services to the immigrant community.

Ms. Sharma logged more than 800 hours of pro bono service in 2011. In her most notable success last year, Ms. Sharma partnered with attorneys

at the ACLU and the Federal Public Defender's office to gain U visa certification from a federal district court judge for 12 victims of a smuggling ring who were held captive and subjected to extreme acts of violence in a drop-house in Riverside, CA. The federal district court judge certified victims for the crime of being held hostage, after the legal team filed what may be a first-of-its-kind motion in a criminal case in the Central District of California. Ms. Sharma coordinated and undertook representation for the victims to obtain U visas. Her work, in partnership with the ACLU, created a model that the Federal Public Defenders will be able to replicate in their many similar cases

in the Central District. Ms. Sharma also represented many migrant and trafficked children in gaining Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and asylum in the United States.

As a co-pro bono liaison for Southern California's AILA chapter, she serves as the coordinator of AILA's Pro Bono Network, offering counsel to unrepresented indigent people before the Los Angeles Immigration Court.

Ms. Sharma joined Stone & Grzegorek LLP in October of 2007. She is certified by the State Bar of California Board of Legal Specialization as a Specialist in Immigration and Nationality Law.

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## Thank You from AILA MAP Task Force Chair, Matthew Maiona

I would like to thank the screeners, volunteers, Michelle Singleton and, of course, the always accommodating Margaret Stock for taking this program to a new level this past year. AILA MAP would not exist without you

all. We have had many successes and all of the volunteers should be proud of what they have accomplished. From coast to coast I have received emails of cases granted, issues resolved and military families kept together. All of this results in

peace of mind for our men and women in uniform as they defend our country day in and day out. I encourage all MAP volunteers who have taken cases this past year to please do so again this year and to those who have not, please take a case and

help those who give so much to us and our families. I look forward to working with all of you again this year and I know together we will help even more military families and continue to make AILA MAP even better. *Thank you!*



LEARN HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER!

# Planning, Partnerships Key to Philadelphia's Citizenship Day

by Judith Bernstein-Baker, Valentine Brown & Lisa Felix

**T**he Philadelphia Chapter of AILA held its annual Citizenship Day on March 31, 2012. As a result, we expect to welcome 73 new American citizens by mid-autumn. Our AILA pro bono team—consisting of Judi Bernstein-Baker, Valentine Brown, and Lisa Felix—met over the summer to begin planning. We decided that in order to facilitate naturalization in time for the elections, we would hold Citizenship Day a month earlier than AILA's nationally designated date. Our team worked remarkably well together; we each had specific roles and supported one another. Judi worked on outreach and on training attorneys and law students; Valentine organized and chaired collaborative conference call planning meetings and also conducted attorney training. Lisa developed attorney training packets and applicant packets and contacted the media. All three of us shared community presentations.

AILA Citizenship Day uses a two-step process to maximize outreach and the number of completed applications. We felt that education about the citizenship process could be combined with screening applicants, which in itself is a service to the community. In addition, holding citizenship information sessions in community-based settings would be an opportunity for additional AILA pro bono involvement. Finally, we felt that by working with community groups we would reach low-income applicants, our target service group. We had already worked with some community groups in past years, but this year, due to the involvement of the Mayor's Commission on Literacy, were able to partner with new groups which had active English Language programs. In



**“On Citizenship Day, 37 attorneys and 31 volunteers interviewed 76 people, and 73 applications were completed. ... Because of the in-person information sessions and pre-screening, the number of completed applications increased significantly.”**

addition, the Mayor's Commission on Literacy staff set up a website providing information about events and a mechanism for attorneys and volunteers to sign up for training sessions and presentations.

Eight groups agreed to perform outreach and host community information sessions at various times beginning in mid-March. At each session an AILA attorney made an hour long presentation on the eligibility for citizenship and the process itself. Following the presentation, AILA attorneys and trained community volunteers interviewed individual applicants to assess whether the individual had both the legal eligibility and language skills needed to apply for citizenship. Complicated cases—such as those with potential disability claims or those with criminal issues—were considered too complex for Citizenship Day and were referred to nonprofits or private attorneys. Once screened, each applicant made a specific appointment at one of the four Citizenship Day sites, and received a list of items to bring on Citizenship Day.

Two hundred forty individuals were screened at the community information sessions. About 20% were eligible for fee waivers based on income. On Citizenship Day itself, 37 attorneys and 31 volunteers interviewed 76 people, and 73 applications were completed. Several attorneys took more than one case so each applicant could file a G-28. (Under our model, we required

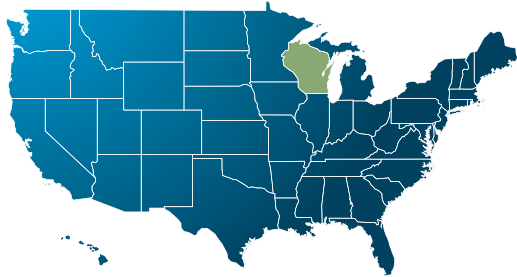
participating attorneys to submit a G-28, which permits attorneys to track and trouble shoot cases on behalf of the applicant.) In previous years we saw about the same number of applicants, but were only able to complete about 70% of the applications either because individuals' cases were too complex or because they lacked needed documents. Because of the in-person information sessions and pre-screening, the number of completed applications increased significantly.

The project built bridges between the immigration bar and the larger pro bono community in Philadelphia. Many of the attorneys who participated were non-immigration attorneys who were trained beforehand. AILA members served as mentors. Seventeen local organizations collaborated for Citizenship Day, and interest in citizenship has remained high. The information session model had other positive consequences; there was tremendous goodwill generated between the community groups and Philadelphia AILA. These efforts are laying the foundation for a citywide approach to citizenship and several groups expressed the desire to collaborate beyond the Citizenship Day event.

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*Judith Bernstein-Baker, Esq., is the executive director of HIAS Pennsylvania. Valentine Brown is a partner with Duane Morris, LLP in Philadelphia. Lisa Felix concentrates her practice on employment immigration.*

## CHAPTER HAPPENINGS: WISCONSIN



### Congratulations to AILA Wisconsin Chapter! Recipient of the Judge Robert W. Warren Public Service Award

**T**he [Eastern District of Wisconsin Bar Association](#) (a federal bar association) recently recognized the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association for outstanding pro bono service to indigent immigrants in Wisconsin. On April 26, 2012, the Eastern District of Wisconsin Bar Association presented the Wisconsin Chapter with the 2012 Judge Robert W. Warren Public Service Award.

The Wisconsin Chapter has developed two successful pro bono programs.

First, since 2008 and in conjunction with the [Marquette University Law School](#) in Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Chapter has staffed the [Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic \(MVLC\)](#) to assist with immigration issues. Through volunteer attorneys and law students, this weekly walk-in clinic provides information and screening on a variety of

legal areas. As visitors to the clinic asked more and more immigration questions, MVLC contacted the Wisconsin AILA Chapter for help.

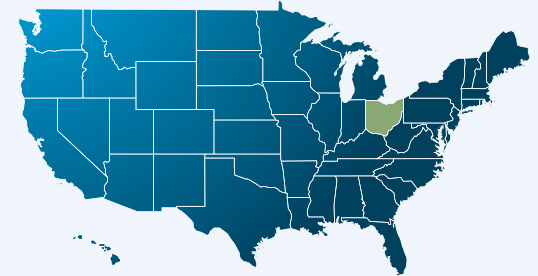
The Chapter enthusiastically responded. The Wisconsin Chapter now provides volunteer attorneys each week the clinic is open. In addition, the Chapter volunteers have conducted continuing legal education training for MVLC attorneys on the basics of immigration law, developed separate trainings for student volunteers designed to enhance their experience with visitors to the MVLC, and created specialized intake forms for visitors to the clinic seeking immigration assistance. Several of the AILA attorneys who volunteer at the weekly clinic have also accepted pro bono cases that have been screened through the clinic.

Second, the Wisconsin Chapter is working in partnership with Catholic Charities to address the growing need for legal services by immigrant victims of domestic abuse. Catholic Charities refers clients to the Wisconsin Chapter to handle applications for benefits under the Violence Against Woman Act (VAWA) or the U nonimmigrant classification. The Chapter's pro bono attorneys have had a number of successes on cases referred under this pro bono program.

As stated by the Eastern District of Wisconsin Bar Association, "[f]or providing these important services to this underserved population of our community, the EDWBA is pleased to recognize . . . AILA's Wisconsin Chapter for [its] outstanding public service."

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## CHAPTER HAPPENINGS: OHIO



The Ohio Chapter's Pro Bono program has been very active over the last several months.

Beginning in 2005, The Migration and Refugee Services department of [Catholic Charities of Cleveland](#) began partnering with the [Legal Aid Society of Cleveland](#) and Ohio AILA to provide refugees a free resource for preparing applications for adjustment of status to permanent residence. The group processing clinics are held five times a year. On average, each clinic serves fifty people, and in the past seven years, the partnering organizations have helped over 400 refugees adjust their status and obtain green cards.

The Ohio Chapter also held a statewide Citizenship Day on April 21. The clinics were held at sites in Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati. Coordinators included Matt Nierman (COL), Jorge Martinez (CINN) and Stacy Cozart (CLE). The overall state numbers were promising and we hope this will continue to be an annual event.

In recognition of its volunteers, the Chapter held a free CLE with the Cleveland EOIR and local practitioners in the area. All three Immigration Judges participated and provided insight as to what each expects in their courtrooms. Following the CLE, the chapter honored several attorneys for their outstanding work and enthusiasm for pro bono. The honorees included Tania Nemer, Farhad Sethna and Eunice Park. We are honored to have such an active group of volunteers.

# AC Pro Bono Clinic a Resounding Success!

by Mark Shmueli

**A**ILA's National Pro Bono Services Committee took a kernel of an idea in 2010 and turned it into a great tradition! In 2010 and 2011, the committee undertook an annual conference project in which AILA partnered with the local San Diego chapter and several community based organizations to sponsor AILA's first-ever limited services pro bono clinic in conjunction with the annual conference. We are pleased to report that our Second Annual Pro Bono Clinic in Nashville, Tennessee, was as great a success as the first! AILA sponsors these clinics both as a way to give back to the annual conference host city's chapter for all of its hard work and also to provide members with the unique chance to perform pro bono services away from their home city.

This year, 25 AILA attorneys provided consultations to over 200 individuals beginning early on Saturday morning at Hillcrest United Methodist Church. Our Nashville partner, Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON) of Tennessee, was extremely well prepared for the clinic, performing extensive community outreach, developing wonderful materials and handling every detail with an overall amazing level of on-the-ground organization.

The attendees hailed from myriad countries and presented a variety of case types. AILA attorneys were

busy reviewing the law and seeking counsel from mentors at the clinic. We are pleased to report that many of the consults should result in cases which will go to local attorneys on the JFON referral list.

The clinic featured volunteers from a variety of chapters. Both newer practitioners and AILA veteran experts participated, including AILA celebrity Ira Kurzban! It was incredibly heartwarming to see the enthusiasm with which the attorneys performed consultation after consultation for over three hours until every person waiting was seen.

As the clinic took place within 24 hours of President Obama's announcement about [deferred action for certain immigrant youth](#), the clinic provided an unexpected opportunity to analyze cases that may become eligible for that program.

In fact, the state's largest newspaper, *The Tennessean* [featured the pro bono clinic](#) as part of its coverage of President Obama's [deferred action announcement](#). Both MidSouth Outgoing Chapter Chair Yvette Sebelist and AILA Associate Director of Practice and Professionalism, Susan Timmons, were interviewed for the article in conjunction with the clinic.

AILA should be extremely proud of the services our members provided during the conference and we look



**SPREAD THE WORD:** In response to the proliferation of immigration scams (notario fraud and the unauthorized practice of immigration law) across the nation, in 2009 AILA launched its stand-alone consumer protection website: [www.stopnotariofraud.org](http://www.stopnotariofraud.org).

Aimed at providing useful facts, up-to-date news, and comprehensive resources for both consumers/victims and licensed attorneys, this site has proven an invaluable source of information. The website is also available in Spanish ([www.parefraudenotarial.org](http://www.parefraudenotarial.org)), with plans for translation into additional languages later this summer. We invite you to use the badges to link to it from your practice's website, as well as for an addition to your e-mail signature block. You can [download the badges on InfoNet](#). Help spread the word and keep fighting against fraudulent immigration consultants in your part of the world.

forward to next year's pro bono clinic in San Francisco. Kudos to those members who took time out of their busy conference schedules to participate in the clinic; it was an incredibly rewarding experience for those that did. As some pro bono activities will occur at each AILA annual conference, we encourage you to [mark your calendar now for San Francisco!](#)

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