



2021 Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Program Plan Summary

Ohio State Legal Services Association (OSLSA) is committed to its mission of ***providing civil legal aid and advocacy to combat unfairness and injustice and to help people rise out of poverty***. OSLSA offers high quality legal services through Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS) and the Legal Aid Society of Columbus (LASC)—our two direct service programs that serve 36 counties ranging from urban Columbus to rural and Appalachian counties.

Our goal is simple: **advocating for our communities**—single mothers, working families, children with disabilities, military veterans, People of Color, immigrants, and seniors—who seek to be heard in the legal system. Their collective voice, amplified through the efforts of civil legal aid attorneys and volunteers, conveys the essential message that remains at the heart of OSLSA: every person—regardless of income—deserves equal access to justice.

OSLSA's 2021 PAI Plan will pursue two goals: (a) adjust systems to accommodate a community grappling with pandemic and post-pandemic conditions; and (b) expand access to rural justice. While doing so, OSLSA will also build the foundation for increasing pro bono participation in extended service cases and in matters that move our impact work forward. In pursuit of these goals, the Plan consists of three core strategies: **Recruitment, Recognition, and Retention**.

The PAI Plan incorporates varied **recruitment tools**. Through court support, organized bar activity, and technology, OSLSA will develop and maintain relationships with attorneys from various fields. With efforts directed at candidates ranging from law students to retired lawyers and paralegals, OSLSA draws from a diverse pool of talent. The organization maintains a strong social media presence and relies on publicity amplification from its strategic partners.

In order to foster growth in the pro bono program, OSLSA makes **recognition a priority**. Through volunteer profiles in its monthly pro bono newsletter, an annual pro bono award ceremony, media coverage, and annual reports, volunteers are championed for their service and achievements. Not only does recognition provide encouragement to potential volunteers, it also deservedly credits current volunteers' hard work and dedication—particularly at a time when the pandemic has forced volunteers to be patient and nimble with new systems.

OSLSA's **retention strategies** focus on recognition, training, mentoring, and volunteer support. Targeted trainings are offered that allow volunteers to earn CLE credit while expanding their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, staff attorneys serve as empowering mentors to volunteers.

Lastly, OSLSA will continue to use **numerous delivery models** to meet the wide array of client needs. Offerings range from case referrals to a roster of attorneys who help with everything from school issues and wills to tax problems and unemployment appeals. OSLSA also offers advice clinics, which were historically held at community partner sites and are currently "virtual" to preserve the health and safety of everyone involved. The switch to a virtual model has also expanded the use of urban volunteers to assist rural clients. Other specialized projects address naturalization, veterans' issues, eviction prevention, and reentry assistance.

OSLSA is constantly striving to creatively and efficiently employ volunteer resources, and these efforts will continue both in spite of and in response to the new challenges facing our communities in 2021.

2021 Private Attorney Involvement Program Plan

Pursuant to 45 CFR §1614.4

I. INTRODUCTION

Ohio State Legal Services Association (OSLSA) is committed to its mission of **providing civil legal aid and advocacy to combat unfairness and injustice and to help people rise out of poverty**. OSLSA offers high quality legal services through Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS) and the Legal Aid Society of Columbus (LASC)—its two direct service programs that serve 36 counties ranging from urban Columbus to the rural and Appalachian counties in the southeastern corner of Ohio

Our goal is simple: **advocating for our communities**—single mothers, working families, children with disabilities, military veterans, People of Color, immigrants, and senior citizens—who seek to be heard in the legal system. Their collective voice, amplified through the efforts of civil legal aid attorneys and volunteers, conveys the essential message that remains at the heart of OSLSA: every person—regardless of income—deserves equal access to justice.

OSLSA's 2021 PAI Plan will pursue two goals: (a) adjust service delivery systems to accommodate a community grappling with pandemic and post-pandemic conditions; and (b) continue to expand access to rural justice. While doing so, OSLSA will also build the foundation for increasing pro bono participation in extended service cases and in matters that move our impact work forward. In pursuit of these goals, the PAI Plan consists of three core strategies: **Recruitment, Recognition, and Retention**.

This PAI Plan incorporates input from all of the branch offices, the executive management, Boards of Directors, Pro Bono Coordinators, local judiciary and bar associations, and other stakeholders in the service area. In developing this Plan, the pro bono team also consulted with segments of the client community, private attorneys, and bar associations.

II. RECRUITMENT, RECOGNITION AND RETENTION

A. Recruitment

Understanding the unique strengths and resources in our community, OSLSA has continued to build upon its traditional recruitment efforts to meet its goals of increasing efficiency, expanding resources to rural communities, and developing a more creative program.

- **RECRUITMENT METHODS: COURT SUPPORT, ORGANIZED BAR ACTIVITY, AND TECHNOLOGY**

Court support remains an integral part of OSLSA's effort to provide greater resources, especially for its rural counties, and to expand its pool of volunteers.

OSLSA will work with the Ohio Supreme Court mentoring program to host an annual event for mentor/mentees where a Supreme Court justice, OSLSA staff, and pro bono attorneys will provide encouragement for and information about existing pro bono opportunities. OSLSA will partner with multiple courts throughout its service area to offer Driver's License Reinstatement and Clean Slate Clinics—programs in which court support is essential. OSLSA will also continue its Franklin

County POWER Act pilot pro bono project, in partnership with the Federal Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Eastern Division.

The **Ohio State Bar Association** Access to Justice and Young Attorney committees will continue to support the new Driver's License Reinstatement clinic, on which OSLSA has partnered in Central Ohio and Southeastern Ohio. In Franklin County, recruitment efforts benefit from collaboration with **Columbus Bar Association** committees. LASC has ongoing partnerships with specific bar sub-committees, including the Bankruptcy, Probate, Estate Planning, and Pro Bono Committees. The CBA also permits use of its social media, publications, and web presence for promoting OSLSA pro bono project offerings and recognizing pro bono attorneys. OSLSA co-sponsors many of its brief advice clinics with other **local bar associations** throughout central and southeast Ohio, who provide support in the recruitment and training of our clinic volunteer attorneys. OSLSA also co-sponsors free CLE offerings with several rural bar associations.

OSLSA will continue to engage with the **Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Central Ohio** (APABA-CO), The **John Mercer Langston Bar Association** (JMLBA), the **Hispanic National Bar Association**, and the **American Immigration Lawyer Association** (AILA).

The increasing use of technology for recruitment serves OSLSA's goal of increasing its efficiencies and scope as well as its goal of bringing urban resources to our rural counties. The websites for both field programs—www.seols.org and www.columbuslegalaid.org—provide information on the menu of pro bono opportunities. The OSLSA pro bono team maintains a presence on social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, and also issues a monthly joint LASC/SEOLS pro bono e-newsletter. Each year, the e-newsletters include a link to the current PAI plan and request feedback from readers.

- **RECRUITMENT AUDIENCES:**

- **NEW LAWYERS** – New lawyers are an excellent resource for OSLSA's pro bono program, as new lawyers are often able to serve as in-house volunteers, are eager to build skills by accepting pro bono cases, and bring energy and enthusiasm to their volunteer participation. In addition to the annual mentor/mentee pro bono reception, OSLSA's pro bono team offer recruitment visits to the Columbus Bar Association New Lawyer Committee, the Barrister Leader program, and the Bar Inc. (lawyer incubator) program.
- **RETIRED LAWYERS AND PARALEGALS** – Retired lawyers and paralegals bring a wealth of knowledge and experience, greater flexibility with scheduling and availability, and an influence with their peers that enables them to serve as ambassadors for the pro bono program. Now in its eighth year, the Volunteer Resource Center recruits recently retired attorneys and paralegals for its core staff, utilizing word-of-mouth and personal connections as its primary recruitment method.
- **SPECIALIZED PRACTITIONERS** – Pro bono case referrals are inevitably more efficient when legal aid programs are able to capitalize on the existing skills and substantive expertise of private attorneys who practice in areas that overlap with poverty law, including those who practice in probate and estate planning, consumer bankruptcy, employment, immigration, real estate, and family law.
- **CORPORATE LAWYERS** – The centralized structure of corporate legal departments allows OSLSA to more efficiently and seamlessly recruit and train for specific

programming. Although events will look different than they have in previous years, OSLSA hopes to both continue and expand upon its partnerships with corporate law departments at Nationwide Insurance, JP Morgan Chase, Alliance Data Systems, LBrands, Huntington Bank, IBM, and BMW Financial. It will also expand on its new affiliation with the Central Ohio Association of Corporate Counsel and Nationwide Insurance to connect nonprofits and small entrepreneurs with pro bono transactional legal help.

- **LAW STUDENTS & UNDERGRADUATES** – Law students remain a key part of service delivery. OSLSA benefits from its proximity to two law schools that offer clinic resources, host (virtual) recruitment events, communicate opportunities via their social media, and co-sponsor pro bono clinics. Undergraduate students have become an important pool of volunteers as well. To reach this group, OSLSA staff attend student events and use social media. Students with ties to the rural communities or attending universities, such as Ohio University, Denison, Kenyon, The Ohio State University Marion and Newark Branches, Franciscan University, and Ohio Wesleyan, will be recruited to assist the local offices. OSLSA is now in its third year of its official collaboration with Ohio University to use “Access to Justice” interns for housing interviews at the SEOLS Athens office.

B. Recognition:

Recognition is a vital component of OSLSA’s pro bono program, as it serves to encourage participation in otherwise untapped areas and increase the participation of current volunteers.

- **VOLUNTEER PROFILES** - OSLSA recognizes current volunteer involvement through e-newsletters, which are routinely republished on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn profiles, and in the bar association media outlets.
- **ANNUAL REPORT** – OSLSA will use the LASC and SEOLS 2020 Annual Reports as an additional means of recognizing volunteers.
- **OCTOBER PRO BONO CELEBRATION** – OSLSA will again use its social media outlets to feature volunteer programming and individual volunteers during the annual ABA Pro Bono Celebration month. OSLSA will partner with the Columbus Bar Association for its annual reception and will explore other means by which rural practitioners can receive recognition for their work.

C. Retention

- **Overlap with Recognition Efforts** – OSLSA will continue to spotlight pro bono achievements by nominating volunteers for awards, featuring articles on outstanding pro bono work on our program websites, submitting pro bono stories to local bar publications, sending personal thank-you cards, and sharing positive client satisfaction surveys. OSLSA has recruited volunteers to work specifically on developing content for recognition articles and will continue to explore use of marketing and communications volunteers in its pro bono work. With available baseline data, OSLSA also hopes to implement a means of publicly recognizing long-term volunteers each year and survey those who scale back volunteer participation.
- **Training, Mentoring and Support** – OSLSA recognizes that training is critical to retaining high quality volunteers. Training events—now virtual—allow attorneys to earn free CLE credits by committing to volunteer. OSLSA regularly records its pro bono CLEs and makes

them available on the LASC and SEOLS websites and is in the process of being approved for self-study CLE credit. OSLSA will review and expand its extensive list of support services, which includes sample pleadings/forms, malpractice insurance, reimbursement of extraordinary litigation expenses, law clerk research support, office space, and access to secretarial support. Staff attorneys serve as substantive law mentors and trainers at pro bono CLEs. OSLSA has also benefited from the use of pro bono attorney mentors, who are matched with less experienced volunteer attorneys in the areas of unemployment compensation, bankruptcy, and naturalization.

III. DELIVERY MODELS

OSLSA will use a variety of delivery models to meet the needs of its client population. All of the programs listed below rely heavily on volunteers, including attorneys, paralegals, and students.

A. Referral Projects

All OSLSA referral projects engage both staff and volunteers who handle client intake, evaluate cases, and make referrals to our attorney panels when appropriate.

- **Volunteer Resource Center (VRC) Housing Project** – Tenants facing evictions from private housing in Franklin County are matched with pro bono attorneys willing to defend them. This project has expanded during the pandemic to include pre-filing representation and remote negotiation by volunteer attorneys who are uncomfortable with in-person contact.
- **VRC Consumer Project** – Clients who are being sued for credit card debt by debt buyer plaintiffs are matched with volunteer attorneys.
- **Unemployment Compensation Appeal Project** – OSLSA matches volunteer attorneys with clients who seek representation in their appeal hearings, which are typically handled telephonically. Columbus volunteers can provide remote representation to rural clients.
- **"IEP Advocacy Project"** – Although stalled in 2020, OSLSA hopes to revive this project, which matches volunteer attorneys and non-attorneys with families who are navigating the complicated special education process and need assistance with drafting or modifying Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
- **Low Income Taxpayer Clinic** – OSLSA maintains a roster of attorneys willing to accept tax cases pro bono through our LASC and SEOLS Low Income Taxpayer Clinics. Attorneys provide representation to low-income taxpayers involved in tax controversies with the Internal Revenue Service, State of Ohio or local tax authorities.
- **Chapter 7 Pro Bono Bankruptcy Project and Reduced Fee Referrals** – OSLSA has a roster of volunteer attorneys who accept Chapter 7 case referrals for very low-income individuals residing in the Southern District of Ohio, Eastern Division. OSLSA also operates

a reduced fee bankruptcy program, which requires all participants to accept at least two pro bono referrals per year.

- **Rural Office Direct Referrals** – Pro bono counsel assist with certain probate, real estate, family law, and employment law matters facing rural clients.
- **Seniors Referrals Project** – Wills and advance directives for seniors and veterans are referred to law students and attorneys, who interview clients and draft forms. During the pandemic, OSLSA has partnered with the Ohio Justice Bus to facilitate the execution of documents for those volunteers who are not able to meet with clients in person.
- **Nonprofit Organization and Transactional Business Referrals** – In conjunction with the Neighborhood Stabilization Project, OSLSA will continue to refer requests for help from nonprofit organizations and low-income entrepreneurs in underserved neighborhoods and communities to corporate attorneys and paralegals. This project has also sought to focus on black-owned entities and other clients disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
- **Veterans Pro Bono Project Referrals** – OSLSA will revive its efforts to engage pro bono attorneys in both full representation and limited scope assistance in veteran-focused matters including VA benefits and discharge upgrade applications.

B. *Brief Advice and Service Clinics*

- **Rural Brief Advice Clinics** – OSLSA hosts 17 recurring brief advice clinics in its rural service area, five of which have a domestic relations focus, and all of which became “virtual” in 2020. When in-person, clinics are staffed with local private attorneys and take place at libraries, churches, courts, legal aid offices, and other accessible locations. While virtual, clients communicate with both local and remote volunteer attorneys by phone.
- **Columbus Brief Advice Clinics** – OSLSA supports brief advice clinics at 16 locations in Franklin County, all of which have been virtual during the pandemic. When in-person, sites include libraries, Jewish Family Services, homeless shelters, churches, the Franklin County Municipal Court Self Help Resource Center, Veteran’s Administration facilities, and the Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio. OSLSA expects to continue virtual clinics in some capacity, even when in-person events return.
- **Virtual Unemployment Clinics** – In response to skyrocketing needs, OSLSA launched a daily unemployment clinic focused on helping individuals apply for unemployment compensation or PUA. When client needs shifted, OSLSA incorporated an advice-only component to the project.
- **Wills Clinics – Paralegal Association of Central Ohio (PACO)** – Once it is safe for volunteers and clients to meet in person, OSLSA hopes to resume these monthly clinics, which take place at low-income senior residential facilities. Teams of one paralegal and one attorney interview the clients, draft documents, and execute the forms utilizing donated computers and printers.
- **Bankruptcy Bypass Clinics** – When it is safe to resume, OSLSA will serve uncollectable elderly and permanently disabled clients who wish to end creditor harassment at this clinic, where student volunteers—supervised by pro bono attorneys—verify uncollectability and

creditor information. In-house volunteers then prepare and send letters to the clients' creditors, with the express purpose of stopping the creditor or debt-collector contact.

- **Clean Slate Clinics** – When it is safe to resume, OSLSA aims to resume its monthly “Clean Slate” clinics in Franklin County and several one-time events in rural counties throughout the service area, offering record-sealing and Certificates of Qualification for Employment assistance with the help of volunteer lawyers and law students. In the meantime, OSLSA offers remote clean slate clinics and referrals for rural and urban clients.
- **Naturalization Clinics** – OSLSA hopes to offer at least one Naturalization event in 2021, involving multiple outreach clinics at community organizations that serve immigrant communities and follow-up N-400 clinics, where clients meet with pro bono attorneys who prepare Naturalization applications. In the meantime, clients are referred to pro bono immigration lawyers, who provide 1:1 assistance with limited in-person contact.
- **Tenant Advocacy Project (TAP)** – OSLSA will continue its daily eviction defense clinic in Franklin County, attended by both staff and pro bono attorneys who provide limited-scope representation to tenants and non-lawyer volunteers who assist with client intake. OSLSA has also started a similar TAP clinic in Delaware and Fairfield Counties and will launch a Muskingum County TAP in early 2021.
- **Neighborhood Based Specialty Clinics** – With LASC’s Neighborhood Stabilization Project, the OSLSA pro bono team expects to develop specialized neighborhood-based PAI clinics addressing estate planning (including Transfer on Death affidavits) and nonprofit/small business guidance. Although intended for 2020, this particular initiative was delayed due to restrictions on in-person events.
- **Driver’s License Reinstatement Clinics** – With a more permanent amnesty program beginning in late 2020, OSLSA expects to again collaborate with community partners, including Ohio BMV, Job & Family Services, local courts and clerks’ offices, and volunteer lawyers, to offer driver’s license reinstatement events in 2021.
- **Bridging the Divide Pilot Clinics** – In 2021, OSLSA will launch its pilot Bridging the Divide clinics, connecting Columbus-based volunteer attorneys with rural litigants who are seeking custody of children, primarily from families impacted by the opiate crisis.
- **Annual Events**
 - a. **Homeless Veterans Stand Down Legal Clinics** - OSLSA expects to yet again recruit pro bono attorneys and non-attorney volunteers to participate in brief advice clinics at the Central Ohio Homeless Veterans Stand Down and the Chillicothe Stand Down.
 - b. **Tax Court Calendar Call** - When the U.S. Tax Court travels to Columbus, OSLSA operates a small, limited scope pro bono clinic on the day of the court’s calendar call. Volunteers primarily advise litigants on the merits of their case and the mechanics of presenting their case pro se.