

Spring 2013

# pro bono program NEWSLETTER

*by and for Michigan Law students*

Issue 3



# Michigan Law

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL



## LAWBreaks: The Give and Take of Winter Break

*by Kelly Hagen*

While most of us were enjoying a Corona on the beach, or at the very least relishing a week away from Transnat while vegging out on our parents' couches, around forty of our Michigan Law classmates were off sharing their hard-earned legal knowledge with the world – literally. Every year, Legal Alternative Winter Breaks (better

known as LAWBreaks) gives students the opportunity to spend their mid-semester break at one of five sites throughout the country. LAWBreaks volunteers focus on a pressing legal problem for the community they are visiting, engaging with that problem as students and as advocates. The trips allow volunteers both to provide pro bono assistance to a community in need and to meet lawyers and other professionals working in the relevant field of law.

It all started when 3L Alisa Whitfield decided to act on her wish to meet with the organization No More Deaths, a

nonprofit based in Arizona that works to end the fatalities that result from immigrants crossing desert regions near the U.S.-Mexico border. Alisa, who had participated in alternative breaks while

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### take the pledge!

Michigan Law has a long tradition of serving the public. That's part of our heritage as a public school, and it stretches back to our beginnings in 1859. To celebrate Michigan Law's 150 years of producing lawyers committed to public service, we launched the Voluntary Pro Bono Pledge in Fall 2009. We ask students to voluntarily commit to performing 50 hours of pro bono service while enrolled at Michigan Law. The Pledge allows students to connect their developing knowledge to the world outside the Law School. In this way, they gain valuable legal skills while helping organizations in our community meet the needs of underrepresented individuals.

## LAWBreaks, *continued from page 1*

an undergraduate, contacted various people and organizations within the Law School and the University of Michigan, and eventually received a grant from the Ginsburg Center, the undergraduate center for public interest. From there, it was only a matter of convincing a few friends to come with her to Arizona for Spring Break – one of the easiest parts of the planning process. With that, along with some generously-provided gas money from Alisa’s mom, LAWBreaks was born.

Two years later, LAWBreaks is flourishing. The entirely student-run organization has met with overwhelming enthusiasm in terms of student participation and now sends volunteers

to five different sites each year. According to LAWBreaks co-founder Gabe Newland, the process of developing new sites is “pretty organic.” The LAWBreaks board locates interesting organizations and locations and determines which sites LAWBreaks will ultimately visit. The board then turns the planning process over to individual site leaders, chosen from a group of applicants, who have flexibility to tailor each trip as they see fit in order to best explore both the geographical area and the target legal issue.

The response of those who have participated in the LAWBreaks program has been overwhelmingly positive. In addition to providing unique, hands-on exposure to the “human side” of the law and beyond giving law students the

opportunity to travel throughout the world, Alisa describes the program as “the best way to connect with people you haven’t met in law school.” Moreover, the long-term benefits of the LAWBreaks program have surprised even its co-founders, with LAWBreaks students discovering future career interests and forging connections at the host organizations that have eventually led to both internships and full-time job opportunities.

Gabe and Alisa both agreed that their LAWBreaks trip was the best week of their 1L year. And as if you needed additional persuading to apply for next year’s trips, consider this bonus: participating in LAWBreaks is a great way to earn hours toward the Pro Bono Pledge!

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# Letter from the Pro Bono Board

We find it hard to believe that another academic year is wrapping up here on the law quad – and no, that’s not just because of the snow flurries and frigid temperatures (Michigan Difference, anyone?) In all seriousness, when we consider the “year-in-review,” we are amazed by all that you have accomplished this year.

We know that we often describe MLaw students as a public service-oriented bunch, but that stereotype was confirmed several times over as we compiled stories for this edition of the pro bono newsletter. Whether it’s volunteering your spring break to travel to underserved communities (see *LAWBreaks: The Give and Take of Winter Break*, page 4), using those research skills to advocate for education policy (see our profile of the Education Law & Policy Society, page 6), or providing direct services to those in need (see our profiles of 2L volunteers Veronica Perera and Katelyn Cherney, pages 6-7), you have embraced the Michigan pro bono tradition – and then some. We can’t wait to see what new efforts you’ll take on next!

Before we set off for summer internships or bar exam prep, we’d like to recognize this year’s graduating 3Ls. You logged 9,822 pro bono hours over the past three years, and 53 of you completed the Pro Bono Pledge. Thank you for your service, your leadership, and your friendship. Best of luck as you head out beyond the law quad!

As for the rest of you, we hope that your summer is both productive and relaxing. See you back here next fall!

Happy reading,  
The 2012-2013 Pro Bono Board

**If you are interested in joining the Pro Bono Board, please contact Amy Sankaran at [aharwell@umich.edu](mailto:aharwell@umich.edu).**

**And as always, don’t forget to take the Pro Bono Pledge!**

<http://www.law.umich.edu/careers/probono>

# Q&A

**Nicholas Gorga ('02), Recruiting Partner at Honigman, Miller, Schwartz & Cohn and former co-chair of Honigman's Pro Bono Committee, joined 2L Megan Sanders for coffee to discuss the vital role private sector attorneys play in supporting public interest legal work.**

Megan Sanders (MS): Can you tell me a bit about your career path and your involvement with pro bono?

Nicholas Gorga (NG): Sure. I spent my 2L summer at Latham & Watkins in Chicago and returned there after graduating. I asked early on in my career to help with a pro bono case, and it went really well. From then on I tried to keep one pro bono case on my plate at all times, and I was even a member of Latham's Pro Bono Committee for a while. But after a few years in Chicago, I returned to Detroit and began working at Honigman. Here at Honigman, I became involved with pro bono right away. As you know, I spent some time as Co-Chair of our Pro Bono Committee, as well.

MS: What initially inspired you to become involved with pro bono?

NG: From a professional development standpoint, taking pro bono cases made sense for a couple different reasons. First, pro bono cases allowed me to get up and do what I was being paid to do – litigate – but without the safety net. That leads to real growth. And second, supervisors notice good performance on pro bono cases; it helps build trust.

Beyond that, I really cared about the issues I was taking on pro bono – I worked with juveniles in delinquency proceedings and with victims of domestic violence. It's really important for attorneys to care deeply about their pro bono cases, because otherwise it can be easy to put them on the backburner and that obviously does the clients a disservice.

MS: So for your personal pro bono work, it came down to professional development and commitment to the issues you were working on. Can you tell me a bit about the role of the Pro Bono Committee at a big firm? Does the Committee decide which pro bono cases the firm will participate in, or do individual attorneys get a say?

NG: Both the Committee and individual attorneys get to decide what pro bono cases we'll work on. If an associate approaches me about a certain kind of case, that bodes well – again, it's important for attorneys to really care about the pro bono cases they take on. But firms have ongoing relationships with non-profits (like Honigman's relationship with the Legal Aid and Defender Association here in Detroit), so some kinds of cases arise regularly. If there's a kind of case the Committee wants the firm to work on, we'll seek out specialty organizations that work on that issue and try to establish that kind of ongoing relationship. For example, we wanted to take on some asylum cases here at Honigman, so we reached out to Freedom House and developed a relationship that way.

MS: Switching gears, I'd love to hear about your return to Detroit and your decision to found Hatch Detroit. You've remained engaged with your community – be it Chicago or Detroit – through pro bono work, so I'm



wondering how you decided to take on the world of small business as well.

NG: When I was working in Chicago, Detroit was in a really bad way. It still is, of course – but it was even worse, and the excitement about revitalization wasn't there yet. I started thinking about the brain drain problem, about all the talent leaving Detroit, and I realized that I was part of the problem. My wife and I are both from the Detroit area and we decided we wanted to move back and do what we could to contribute to the city's redevelopment. That's where small business comes in. People want to live in neighborhoods with vibrant and diverse retail options. If you think about any great city (New York, Chicago, San Francisco), neighborhoods with dense retail are a major draw. When I moved back to Detroit, it had some great shops and restaurants, but they were scattered around the city. That needed to change.

I founded Hatch Detroit with my friend Ted Balowski, an entrepreneur.

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## Immigration Law in Arizona

One group of students travelled to Arizona to focus on immigration. First, they travelled to Phoenix to volunteer with the Florence Project and Friendly House, two non-profits that provide free legal assistance to immigrants. While in Phoenix, they also attended a Know Your Rights presentation and a juvenile detention hearing.

Next was Tucson, where they spent a day with Border Control, attended an Operation Streamline hearing put on by the Department of Homeland Security, met with a public defender, and visited a detention center. The trip closed with a two-day hike through the desert where students participated in water dropping for migrants crossing the area.



# LAWBreaks 2013:

Tucson. Window Rock. New Orleans. Detroit. Belize.

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Five cities, one week. Our conclusion?  
We're definitely applying to go next year. Check it out!

## Poverty Law in Detroit

Twelve students worked with three non-profit organizations in the Detroit area: Freedom House, The Detroit Center for Family Advocacy, and The Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit. At Freedom House, a temporary home for asylum-seekers and refugees, students observed intake interviews and interacted with those living in the home. At the Center for Family Advocacy, students attended trials at juvenile court. And at the Fair Housing Center, students drafted motions and observed on-site discrimination testing.

On the side, students explored the city: attending a Red Wings game, chowing down at Slow's BBQ, and bowling at the Latino Mission Society, a neighborhood resource center.



## Criminal Justice in NOLA

Eleven students traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana. Four volunteered with the Louisiana Capital Assistance Center, helping create a research database. Another four worked with the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, helping gather case histories of juvenile offenders sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Finally, three students volunteered with Orleans Public Defenders, where they wrote memos, assisted in jury selection, and helped file motions in ongoing criminal trials. On the final day of the trip, the group traveled to Angola Prison, the largest maximum security prison in the United States, where they toured the facilities, including the lethal injection room and death row, and spoke with prisoners about their experiences.



## Human Rights Law in Belize

Five of the students who travelled to Belize worked with the Ombudsman's Office, an independent Parliamentary Commission that investigates complaints of injustice, injury, or abuse motivated by discrimination based on religion, language, race, color, or creed. The three remaining students worked with the National Institute of Culture and History, which oversees museums and institutes related to Belizean culture and aims to create educational art programs, increase cross-cultural understanding, and encourage creativity and freedom of expression. The volunteers researched implementing legislation in the National Institute of Culture and History Act, as well as other Caribbean countries' carnival legislation.



## Tribal Law in Window Rock

A final group of students traveled to Window Rock, Arizona to work with DNA Legal Services on a Navajo reservation. Students provided legal assistance of all sorts to those on the reservation, advising on issues such as protecting children from bullying and harassment at school, assisting victims of predatory loan schemes that prey on tribal members, and establishing guardianship rights that ensure State compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act. The students also had the chance to visit the Navajo Nation Court to attend the swearing in of one of the DNA-Legal Services attorneys before the Chief Justice of the Court and to meet with Justice Carol Perry to hear her perspective on the intersection of Navajo culture and traditional law.

### Want to join LAWBreaks next year?

Look for applications in September.  
You can also read more about this year's trips on the LAWBreaks website: <http://sites.google.com/a/umich.edu/lawbreaks>.



# Spotlight on Pro Bono: Year-in-Review by Emily Suran

## Group Project: *Education Law & Policy Society*

*Nominated by Joshua Arocho*

The Education Law and Policy Society (ELPS) recently put together a fifty-page policy report for the ACLU that looks at for-profit education management organizations and analyzes recent bills in the Michigan legislature relevant to the privatization of educational services.

ELPS brings together Michigan Law students who served as teachers either through education graduate programs, Teach For America, Teaching Fellows, or the Peace Corps, as well as students who did not partake in the aforementioned programs but nevertheless have a strong desire to engage with education policy. ELPS strives to increase awareness and generate discussion among members of the Michigan Law community by hosting speakers and events throughout the school year; it

also serves as a resource for law students who are interested in pursuing careers in education.

The group's research was sparked by impending legislation that would make it easier for for-profit Education Management Organizations to run Michigan's charter schools. ELPS got in touch with Kary Moss, Executive Director of the ACLU of Michigan, to offer help in developing the ACLU's policy on for-profit education in Michigan.

Joshua Arocho, Cari Carson, Cynthia Cho, Lora MacDonald, Nina Ruvinsky, and Brendan Vantor authored the final report, which explores the emergence of K-12 for-profit education and weighs its costs and benefits. Anisha Asher, Fermin Mendez, Matthew Specht, and Daniel Wells provided additional research support. In all, roughly 100 hours went into the research, writing, and compilation of the report. ♦

## Individual Volunteer: *Veronica Perera*

*Nominated by Lara Wagner*

Veronica (Nickie) Perera is a 2L. She currently serves as a co-chair for both the Public Benefits Advocacy Project (PBAP) and LAWBreaks.

Nickie was a volunteer and site leader with PBAP her 1L year. As a co-chair this year, Nickie has been instrumental in expanding the organization's scope. Through her efforts and volunteer support, PBAP now serves two new community sites. In addition, PBAP can now help clients with Medicaid as well as food assistance.

Nickie helped lead the Arizona LAWBreaks trip her 1L year. The focus of that trip was immigration law and policy. Prior to the trip, Nickie was unfamiliar with immigration law, and so she was excited to spend a week immersed in the subject. As a co-chair of the umbrella program this year, Nickie served as support for the many trip leaders. In addition, she went on the LAWBreaks New Mexico trip, and she spent the week volunteering at the local legal aid office and helping residents with civil litigation issues. Nickie enjoys being a part of

LAWBreaks because the trips provide law students with unique opportunities to put their skills into practice and learn about a particular field of law and a particular community.

As her friend and nominator Lara Wagner put it, "Nickie is the first person I think of when I think of pro bono at Michigan!" ♦



# Individual Volunteer: *Katelyn Cherney*

*Nominated by Katharine Roller*

Katelyn Cherney is a 2L who works extensively with the Public Benefits Advocacy Project.

Before coming to law school, Katelyn's full-time job had her working on Social Security disability applications, and so PBAP was a natural extracurricular choice. During her 1L fall term, Katelyn worked as an Office Hours Volunteer at Legal Services of South Central Michigan (LSSCM). She was eager to expand her knowledge of public benefits and happy for the opportunity to be involved with neighborhood legal services.

Now, Katelyn occupies a dual role on the PBAP Executive Board as an Office Hours Co-coordinator and as the Delonis Center Site Coordinator. As an Office Hours Co-coordinator, Katelyn trains and supervises the Office Hours Volunteers. In addition, she handles the nitty-gritty of PBAP's efforts by contacting DHS caseworkers to find out why benefits have been reduced or denied and

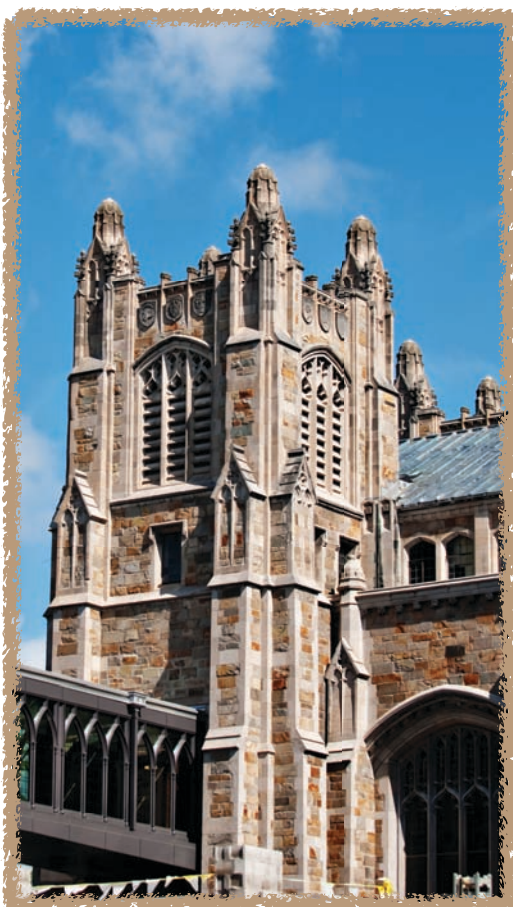
contacting clients to help them through the application and approval process. As a Site Coordinator of the Delonis Center, a homeless shelter, Katelyn works a regular shift during which she provides direct services for clients.

Katelyn enjoys her work with PBAP because it enables her to hone the skills she will need to be the sharp, resourceful and compassionate lawyer she arrived at Michigan Law with the intention of becoming. Friend Katharine Roller says, "She is so dedicated to this work, and she inspires the rest of us to give 100%, too!" ♦



**Know a pro bono volunteer or project whose efforts deserve the spotlight?**

*Contact Allison Nichols at [anic@umich.edu](mailto:anic@umich.edu), and your story could be in the next newsletter!*



**Q&A,**  
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It's essentially a competition. Potential small businesses compete for \$50,000 in cash and \$50,000 of in-kind prizes, including legal services from Honigman. The public participates in the competition by voting – we call this "crowd entrepreneurship." There's only one winner, but all the competitors (especially the finalists) receive great exposure by virtue of their participation and are often able to obtain start-up funding from other organizations as a result.

*MS:* It's obviously been a great success. Has your background as an attorney proved particularly helpful?

*NG:* Absolutely. With a legal background, you spot all sorts of issues that entrepreneurs might overlook and you can help small businesses think through their options more systematically than they otherwise would. This creates stronger, more sustainable non-profits and retail businesses down the line – which is exactly what Detroit needs. ♦

**Know an attorney with an interesting pro bono story to share?**

*Contact Allison Nichols at [anic@umich.edu](mailto:anic@umich.edu), and your interview could be featured here.*

# How To... Start a Pro Bono Project

*by Sarah Thompson*

Michigan law hosts a thriving pro bono community. The law school's Pro Bono Program lists over 40 currently active pro bono projects on its website. Where did these projects come from? What does it take to start – and maintain – a successful pro bono project? Although pro bono projects follow many paths from conception to implementation, there are a few questions that anyone interested in founding a new project must consider:

## **1** Whom will my pro bono program serve?

Inspiration can strike from almost anywhere. For 2L Ariana Fink, it came in the classroom. Fink, who is working on launching a “Know Your Rights” campaign for youth aging out of the foster care system, was inspired by a seminar research project. Taking a topic from classroom to pro bono provides students hands-on experience with a topic that they have studied. Professors, especially Michigan's clinical faculty, can offer insight into which areas of law need pro bono volunteers and how to create and implement a project.

2L Monet Brewerton founded the Michigan Prisoner Advocacy Program

(MPAP) after attending lunch sessions on prisoners' rights, explaining “after attending a number of lunch talks, I saw that we are in a community with a significant need.” MPAP seeks to meet that need by surveying prisoners on their experience with prison grievance processes and helping to run parole readiness workshops.

## **2** What will my pro bono project do?

There are many different types of projects at the law school—from FAIT's high school mock trial team, to Family Law Project's program working with victims of domestic violence. Amy Sankaran, Director of Michigan Law's Pro Bono Program, describes pro bono at Michigan as “pretty inclusive; I want students to get out there and use their legal skills.” Although there are certain requirements that all projects must meet (discussed below), the pro bono program aims to offer many different types of experiences.

Pro bono projects are generally categorized as database, research, internship, client counseling, or policy projects. The first two categories are pretty self-explanatory. Internships allow students to travel to offices of community organizations. Client counseling projects allow students to work directly with clients, and policy projects can include legislative drafting, “Know Your Rights Campaigns”, and other initiatives. Often projects will overlap into multiple categories.

## **3** What does the law school require?

Michigan Law defines pro bono work as (1) law related; (2) supervised or approved by an attorney; (3) provided to the client free of charge or at a substantially reduced rate; (4) not for credit and uncompensated; and (5) provided to underrepresented persons, interests, or communities on behalf of a non-profit or government organization approved by the Office of Student Affairs. Sankaran sums up the requirements by saying “you need an idea and a supervisor.”

## **4** How do I reach out to the broader community?

Those interested in starting pro bono projects are encouraged to reach out to local community organizations. Brewerton recalls making phone calls and sending emails to various local organizations to get an idea of how she and fellow students might advocate for prisoners' rights. She recounts that “for the most part, people want to talk to you, and even if they don't have a need for volunteers, they can direct you to those who do.” Sankaran agrees, noting that “reaching out to community organizations is key, and coming to them with ideas about how you might help may give you credibility.” Sankaran and other law school professors may be able to assist you in brainstorming which organizations to contact.

## **5** How will I get volunteers and other resources?

A great way to gain resources for your project is to team up with a student organization. According to Sankaran, many of the “super successful pro bono projects have student group infrastructures.” Joining

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your project with a student group will provide a natural audience for your program, and it is also a way to ensure that your program endures for years to come. For example, Fink described how LACY and the Poverty Law Society successfully teamed up to help launch her “Know Your Rights” project on a broader scale.

However, it is not necessary to merge your pro bono project with a student organization. Brewerton’s MPAP is not under the umbrella of a student group, although the Prisoners’ Rights Organization of Students provided financial support when the project first began. Since then, Brewerton has successfully recruited volunteers via email. However, Brewerton notes that there are advantages to creating your project under the umbrella of a student group, saying “I don’t know what will happen to my projects when I do an externship next semester; I am looking for someone to take over the project when I leave.”

## 6 How do I make it official?

The requirements for listing a pro bono project are simple. Go to the Michigan Law Pro Bono homepage, click on the “List a Project” button, and complete the short form with all of the information that you currently have. After submitting the form, your project will be sent to Sankaran for approval, which is readily given to pro bono projects with supervisors.

Founding a pro bono project at Michigan law can be a painless process. Sankaran states that “it requires a little bit of go-getterism, but those students who follow it through are wildly successful.” To Brewerton, the reward of running a project in her area of interest far outweighs any costs. “It has been a huge emotional commitment, and can at times be frustrating, but people here are supportive. I have found that volunteering grounds you in reality and that the benefits to you are as significant as to the people you are helping.” ♦

**Students interested in creating a new pro bono project are encouraged to contact Amy Sankaran at [aharwell@umich.edu](mailto:aharwell@umich.edu) or to visit her in 303 Hutchins.**

And don’t forget: There are plenty of opportunities for students to participate in and lead existing pro bono projects – see the Pro Bono Program website for a complete list of existing projects!

# The 2012-2013 Pro Bono Board

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*with pro bono program director Amy Sankaran*

