



MICROSOFT AND LAW FIRMS CONTRIBUTE TO AWARD WINNING IMMIGRATION LAW PROJECT

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A team of attorneys from Microsoft and Seattle law firms has been awarded a national pro bono award for their innovative public service project: Volunteer Advocates for Immigrant Justice (VAIJ). Collaborating law firms include Davis Wright Tremaine LLP; Dorsey & Whitney LLP; Heller Ehrman LLP; Holland & Knight LLP; Perkins Coie LLP; Preston Gates & Ellis LLP; and Riddell Williams P.S. The Corporate Pro Bono Partner Award will be presented to the team during the Pro Bono Institute's Annual Seminar in Washington, DC, on March 2, 2006.

The CPBO Pro Bono Partner Award recognizes unique pro bono partnerships between and among in-house corporate legal departments, law firms and public interest organizations. This year's winning project, VAIJ, is a legal representation program in the Seattle area that offers free legal assistance to detained immigrants seeking asylum or other forms of relief before the immigration courts.

"VAIJ is a great example of an in-house legal department taking the lead and providing assistance to those in dire need of legal services," notes CPBO Director Eve Runyon.

"Immigration has a tremendous historic value in our country, and VAIJ provides a great public service by offering high-quality, professional representation to individuals seeking to improve their lives in the US."

Susan Hackett, the Senior Vice President and General Counsel of the Association of Corporate Counsel, the co-presenter of the award added, "Law departments are incredibly influential in their local legal communities and Microsoft's leadership in energizing and giving legs to this effort has created a catalyst for law firm, local bar and community mobilization around this important project. Our CPBO award recognizes that there is strength and creativity in collaboration and that by working together, more people in need will be helped."

United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a unit of the Department of Homeland Security, detains over 200,000 immigrants and refugees each year. Many of these immigrants are fleeing persecution, civil war, ethnic conflict and religious and political persecution. A growing percentage of immigrant detainees are undocumented and unaccompanied children. Others include long-time residents of the United States who have committed immigration violations and are being held in detention while their cases proceed through the immigration courts.

Of the approximately 500 immigrants held in detention in the state of Washington at any given time, only 20 percent have legal representation. For a detainee, losing his or her case can result in separation from their family, return to a country where he or she may not have resided in many years, or where persecution, even death, awaits.

“The success rate of a detained asylum seeker who has access to legal assistance is six times that of an immigrant without legal representation,” says Lydia Tamez, the associate general counsel at Microsoft who led the implementation of the VAIJ project. “Microsoft saw the tremendous need for legal assistance for vulnerable immigrants and asylum seekers, and realized it could draw on the expertise of its in-house immigration team and the talents of attorneys in other legal practices to make a difference.”

Microsoft launched VAIJ in 2003, in cooperation with the American Bar Association and partner law firms, to address increasingly complex immigration issues. VAIJ works together with the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP), the immigration court and the broader legal community to provide legal representation to asylum seekers and refugees – particularly unaccompanied minors – who have strong claims for relief but are unable to afford to hire private counsel. NWIRP screens and refers cases to VAIJ, which reviews each case and matches the immigrant with legal volunteers for representation. VAIJ also provides in-depth training, mentoring, resources, support and guidance throughout the duration of each case.

“The VAIJ project has become a highly effective advocate for immigrant adults and children, and has been very successful in leveraging finite community resources to better serve the immigrant community,” said Brad Smith, general counsel at Microsoft.

Since its inception, VAIJ has recruited over 100 volunteers, including attorneys from Microsoft’s in-house counsel department, as well as participating law firms and bar associations. Other VAIJ volunteers include paralegals, law students, physicians, translators and mental health professionals. In total, over seventy client cases have been placed with volunteers, and VAIJ has provided individual screenings to over 450 individuals, including 21 detained children.

About Microsoft Corporation

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq “MSFT”) is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential.

About Corporate Pro Bono

Corporate Pro Bono (www.cpbo.org) is a national outreach project cosponsored by the Association of Corporate Counsel (www.acca.org) and the Pro Bono Institute (www.probonoinst.org). Through online services, technical assistance to the in-house community, and educational outreach, CPBO encourages and supports the participation of in-house counsel in pro bono services.

About the Pro Bono Institute at Georgetown University Law Center

Established in 1996, PBI is a non-profit organization with a mandate: to explore and identify new approaches to - and resources for - the provision of legal services to the poor, disadvantaged, and other individuals or groups unable to secure legal assistance to address critical problems. In doing so, the Institute identified and develops innovative programs and undertakes rigorous evaluations to ensure that these new approaches are workable and effective. The Institute administers a number of projects designed to enhance access to justice, including: the Law Firm Pro Bono Project, the Corporate Pro Bono Project, and the Reinventing Pro Bono Project for public interest organizations.

About Association of Corporate Counsel

The Association of Corporate Counsel is the in-house bar associationSM, serving the professional needs of attorneys who practice in the legal departments of corporations and other private sector organizations worldwide. The association promotes the common interests of its members, contributes to their continuing education, seeks to improve understanding of the role of in-house attorneys, and encourages advancements in standards of corporate legal practice. Since its founding in 1982, the association has grown to more than 17,500 members in 53 countries who represent more than 7,800 organizations. For more information, go to www.acca.com.

Developed by Corporate Pro Bono
A global partnership project of the [Pro Bono Institute](http://www.probonoinst.org) and the [Association of Corporate Counsel](http://www.cpbo.org)
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