

# PRO BONO NEWSLETTER

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"To devote your skill and energy to the plight of another, without the promise of a material reward for oneself, is what sets us apart as professionals." John Adams, 1761

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#### AILA Wants to Recognize Your Pro Bono Work

As we celebrate AILA's 60 years of service to our nation's immigrants, we also want to honor our members' commitments to public service and pro bono work. In this year's Directory, AILA will recognize each of its members who have provided at least ten (10) hours of pro bono service in the last year. For those members that have contributed twenty (25) or more hours of pro bono service to our immigrant communities in the last year, AILA will also award a 10% discount coupon for AILA publications\*, and members that have provided at least fifty (50) hour of pro bono service will receive a 25% off coupon for AILA publications\*. We want to honor your commitment to service and determine how to better facilitate our member's pro bono efforts, so we ask that you complete the questionnaire at: <a href="http://www.aila.org/surveys/probono.asp">http://www.aila.org/surveys/probono.asp</a> by June 30, 2006 to ensure your inclusion in our recognition of AILA's Pro Bono efforts.

\*Coupons are valid for one book order

### Promote Your Organization or Program at AILA's Annual Conference

AILA would like to provide your organization with a forum for publicizing pro bono opportunities to our members at our Annual Conference in San Antonio this June 21-24. We will provide a display table in our Exhibit Hall that can be utilized by your organization and other non profit organizations to provide information on volunteer opportunities.

We would like to have this table staffed during the Exhibit Hall hours and ask that, if you are attending the Annual Conference, you considering signing up to staff the table during one or more of the 1-hour time slots. This would give you an opportunity to meet with attendees and promote your program. Please email your time slot request to Tricia Riviere at triviere@aila.org. If you wish to bring materials to place on the display table, please limit it to not more than 50 copies of not more than 2 different pieces of literature. You should bring the materials to the Exhibit Hall when it opens on Wednesday evening, June 21st, at 5:00pm. If you intend to display materials, please email that information to Tricia Riviere so we are able to plan for appropriate table space.

#### NY Chapter Hosts Event in Support of Pro Bono

On April 3, 2006 the New York Chapter hosted a launch of AILA's pro bono project. The evening kicked off with a keynote address from AILA's President, Deborah Notkin. Six organizations from the New York area were on hand to describe their compelling need for volunteers. The evening culminated with a CLE on obtaining Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Materials from the CLE are available free of charge at: <a href="http://www.refugees.org/data/nationalcenter/training\_manuals/pdf/training\_manual.pdf">http://www.refugees.org/data/nationalcenter/training\_manuals/pdf/training\_manual.pdf</a>

To volunteer with an organization seeking pro bono services, please visit AILA's pro bono page under Practice Resources on Infonet.

### **Know Your Rights Materials**

Recent raids and arrests have left many fearful. To help counter some of the fear and myths, the American Immigration Law Foundation has prepared a resource list on Employer Sanctions and Know Your Rights materials. The list is available on AILA infonet at Document No. 06042569.

### Pro Bono Feature: Tour of the Border By Carlina Tapia-Ruano

On Wednesday, October 5, 2005, Kathleen Walker and I arrived at South Padre Island, near Brownsville, Texas, to begin a two-day tour of the Mexican border. We were attending an event sponsored by the American Bar Association for the purpose of educating a group of about 75 attorneys from all over the US of the circumstances faced by immigrants who attempt to enter the US without legal documents. It was a moving and heart wrenching experience.

As part of the program, the attorneys were provided with a guided tour of Fort Brown Station in Brownsville, where the Border Patrol screen and detain immigrants who are caught crossing the Rio Grande or entering Texas by land borders without legal documents. While touring the Fort Brown Station we witnessed around 15 to 20 children, ranging in ages from 10 to 17 years, being held in holding cells at the facility. The cells were large, barren rooms, with a single sink and toilet. They had neither windows nor furniture, and the only place to sit or lay was on concrete slabs connected to the concrete walls and floors. The overhead light bulb was on 24 hours a day, and meals consisted of baloney sandwiches and small boxes of fruit juice.

I stopped at one of the cells and spoke to a young boy standing near an open door that led into the central room where the immigration agents sat. He looked like he was about 10 years old. In Spanish I asked how he was doing. Several seconds passed before he responded. As I waited, I looked at his face. Tears had dug gulleys into the dirt on his face. It made him appear profoundly sad and hopeless. When he finally responded he spoke barely above a whisper, softly saying "bien". I became suddenly overwhelmed and could say nothing. I offered a smile in return and moved away.

The Border Patrol informed us that the detainees, including the children, are kept in these cells from 5 to 7 days, and sometimes up to several weeks, before they are either returned to Mexico or placed in more permanent detention centers around Brownsville. Once placed in these detention centers, the children are separated from the adults (including their parents), and the men are separated from the women. All of them have very limited access to legal representation due to their lack of funds for attorneys' fees and the shortage of pro bono attorneys available in the area. They sit around all day, for days and weeks on end, waiting for word on their fate.

The need for legal representation for these detained immigrants is great and ever increasing. I have represented foreign nationals before the immigration agency and courts for many years and have become somewhat inured to the pain these proceedings often entail. However, the experience of seeing these desperate children and adults suffering extended periods of confinement in uncomfortable surroundings, with little information or legal representation before government officials, was exceedingly painful to witness. There is little doubt in my mind that we must find a way to do more to help. I invite comments and suggestions from the membership.

#### **Volunteer Opportunities**

## National Center for Refugee & Immigrant Children seeks volunteers and mentors!

Thanks to your support, National Center for Refugee & Immigrant Children is making a difference!

Since opening intake in June 2005, the National Center for Refugee & Immigrant Children (Center), a partnership between the U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants (USCRI) and AILA, has received over 950 requests for assistance, matched over 270 children with *pro bono* attorneys and provided brief services to approximately 800 of these children with help such as social service referrals, advice on seeking continuances, changes of venue, and other procedural matters. USCRI's partnership with AILA is key to the continued success of the program, as its members continue to dedicate their time and share their expertise with other *pro bono* attorneys throughout the country.

AILA members are making a tremendous difference in the lives of so many immigrant children like "Maria," a 13 year old girl who found herself all alone in her home country of El Salvador. The law firm of Jenkens & Gilchrist represents "Maria" and they are currently pursuing the possibility that "Maria" could derive citizenship through her United States Citizen grandmother.

#### **HELP US GIVE CHILDREN HOPE!**

You can help us continue to make a difference by volunteering your time to represent a child or sharing your expertise as a mentor. Mentorship can vary from sharing specific country asylum expertise, sharing sample briefs, troubleshooting on an appellate issue to

walking a young attorney though a case. If you would like to sign up to represent a child or mentor another attorney, please visit us at <a href="https://www.refugees.org/nationalcenter">www.refugees.org/nationalcenter</a>.

#### **HELP US MEET THE NEED!**

The Center's seed grant ends in December 2006. USCRI is raising funds to ensure the Center continues to provide assistance to over one thousand immigrant children each year. Help us give these children a place to call in their time of urgent need, donate at www.refugees.org/nationalcenter.

## The Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) Pro Bono Project seeks volunteers and mentors!

The BIA Project works to increase the level of pro bono representation to immigrants who are detained and without representation before the BIA. The Project is coordinated by the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC); and supported by the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF), the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition, and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIPNLG).

The Project concentrates on finding representation for the following:

- Asylum-seekers;
- Minors:
- Individuals who received a favorable decision by an Immigration Judge which was subsequently appealed by the government;
- Individuals with a case where the Immigration Judge requested certification of his/her decision from the BIA.

All cases involve persons who were not represented before the Immigration Judge, and who remain pro se before the BIA. BIA Project cases are carefully screened by attorneys representing CLINIC and its partner agencies. This selection process ensures that the cases involve compelling issues of law and fact. Under the Project, new briefing schedules and extensions are granted so that there is ample time to prepare the appeal. Interested volunteers should contact Molly McKenna, the NGO Coordinator for the BIA Project, at <a href="mailto:mmckenna@cliniclegal.org">mmckenna@cliniclegal.org</a>.

If you don't have time to write a brief, but want to support the BIA Project, consider signing up to be a mentor! To better engage law firms with limited immigration practices in the BIA Project, the Project conducts trainings and pairs individual attorneys with seasoned immigration practitioners. The Project needs experienced immigration practitioners to mentor eager pro bono attorneys with limited immigration backgrounds. Mentors might help develop case strategy, answer substantive legal questions, point attorneys in the right direction in terms of research, and/or review briefs prior to submission to the BIA.

For more information about the BIA Project, contact Molly McKenna at CLINIC at <a href="mmckenna@cliniclegal.org">mmckenna@cliniclegal.org</a> or (202) 635-2567.

Please volunteer today. Your help will make a difference. As one detainee represented through the BIA Project notes: "One of the greatest ways of love is to help others in their times of need. Many people, without even knowing me, are helping me in my deepest needs. Your help, care, and concern help me keep hope."