

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

Erie County Bar Association
Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc.
237 Main Street, Suite 1000
Buffalo, New York 14203

Phone: 716-847-0662



The Immigration Program



ERIE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

**VOLUNTEER LAWYERS
PROJECT, INC.**



How Attorneys Can Get Involved

We handle an array of immigration matters, and depending on the experience level and interest areas of the attorney seeking to volunteer his/her services to our Immigration Program, we can accommodate pro bono attorneys, though we generally place cases from the specific practice areas listed in this brochure.

Additionally, if an experienced immigration attorney identifies a case that s/he would like to handle, but the client is low-income and cannot afford to pay, the attorney may approach us about handling the case under our auspices. VLP's Immigration Program appears on the "List of Pro Bono Legal Service Providers" distributed by the Buffalo and Batavia immigration courts, and so we are particularly interested in placing non-citizens in removal proceedings with volunteer attorneys.

Every fall, we hold an annual CLE to train attorneys on representing noncitizens in removal proceedings. A video of our 2015 training is available.

VLP offers CLE credit to those attorneys handling a pro bono case.

Call us at 716.847.0662.

- Sophie Feal, *Immigration Program Director*, x314
- Emma Buckthal, *Senior Immigration Attorney*, x302
- Ramon Irizarry, *Immigration Attorney*, x332
- Brenda Cisneros, *Immigration Attorney*, x304
- Molly M. Deacon, *Immigration Attorney*, x214
- Maria A. Valeri, *Board Accredited Immigration Representative*, x318
- Jerry Owassi, *Immigration Paralegal*, x306



What We Do

Since 1999, the Immigration Program of the Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) has served an array of the non-citizen community present in New York State and other parts of the country through diverse projects generously funded by several sources.

We currently operate with a staff of six immigration attorneys and two paralegals from our office in Buffalo, New York, with a sub-office in Batavia, New York, and we always seek pro bono attorneys to handle matters ranging from naturalization to asylum, before the Citizenship and Immigration Services or the Immigration Courts in Buffalo and Batavia.

Our Projects

THE LEGAL ORIENTATION PROGRAM (LOP)

The Legal Orientation Program (LOP) has been a mainstay of our immigration work. We are currently funded through a contract with the Vera Institute of Justice in New York, New York.

The LOP allows us to provide weekly “know

your rights” presentations, in English and Spanish, to groups of non-citizen men* detained by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for removal proceedings at the Buffalo Federal Detention Facility (BFDF) in Batavia. We also provide individual orientations and pro se workshops to teach the detainees how to best represent themselves before the immigration court. Our funding precludes us from offering direct representation, but we recruit, train and mentor pro bono lawyers to provide representation in certain cases.

In our LOP work, we see men* from all over the world, some of whom are long-term lawful permanent residents of the U.S., and others who have recently arrived and are seeking asylum from persecution in their native countries.

NEW YORK IMMIGRANT FAMILY UNITY PROGRAM (NYIFUP)

NYIFUP is also funded by the Vera Institute of Justice in New York, NY and is an attempt to create a “public defender” style program for men* detained at the BFDF in Batavia. VLP’s immigration program was initially involved in this endeavor during a pilot project funded by New York State. We represented 55 men with that initial funding. Currently, we are contracted to represent 50 detained men facing removal proceedings. Clients are selected through a “universal representation” or “public defender” model without triaging or consideration of the merits of the case, although NYIFUP clients must meet an income eligibility

requirement to qualify for services. Because funding for this project is limited, VLP and Vera developed a staggered intake model to determine which clients it will be able to represent under existing funding. Most of our clients are seeking asylum in the U.S., and in some instances, the cases are handled by pro bono attorneys.

**We can also assist detained non-citizen women with LOP and NYIFUP funding but because women are detained by DHS in county jail in Upstate New York, the logistics are more complicated and we serve far fewer women. Women are also much less frequently detained.*



UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Unaccompanied children are represented by VLP also with funding by Vera when they have been placed in foster care at Catholic Family Center in Rochester, New York. Since the children must appear in Buffalo for removal proceedings, VLP staff lawyers represent them and recruit, train and mentor pro bono lawyers to represent the children.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking have several options

under U.S. immigration law to normalize their status, and our program represents them in these matters with funding from Neighborhood Legal Services.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Survivors of human trafficking are represented in their immigration cases by VLP’s Immigration Program with a grant in partnership with the International Institute of Buffalo (IIB). IIB provides trafficking survivors with a wealth of social services, and the two organizations work collaboratively to make certain their clients’ legal, social, and health care needs are met. We seek to obtain special “T” visas for these clients, or other immigration relief, and then apply for permanent residence on their behalves.

WNY IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE CENTER

The Supreme Court ruling in *Padilla v. Kentucky*, 559 U.S. 356 (2010) now requires criminal defense attorneys to advise noncitizen clients as to the potential immigration consequences of a criminal conviction before taking a plea.

Through a grant from the NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services and in collaboration with The Legal Aid Society of Rochester, New York, we provide training, technical assistance and other legal support to attorneys in the 7th and 8th Judicial Districts of New York who provide mandated representation to noncitizens in criminal and family court proceedings so they can fully advise their noncitizen clients as to the immigration consequences of their particular case.