



Justice Starts in Law School: Expanding Pro Bono Through Academic Partnerships

2026 Equal Justice Conference

Thursday, May 14, 2026



Who We Are

Amy Hsieh



**Executive Director,
Public Service Law Center &
Adjunct Professor**
Brooklyn Law School
New York City, NY

**Jeanne
Ortiz-Ortiz**



**Director | DiMartino/Smith
Public Interest Center &
Adjunct Professor**
St. John's University School
of Law
New York City, NY

Gina D'Amico



**Deputy Director, Case
Evaluation & Litigation,
CAVC Practice**
The Veterans Consortium
Pro Bono Program
Washington, D.C.

Aaron J. Irving



General Magistrate, State of
Florida
Director of Pro Bono and
FLARE (2022-2026)
Jacksonville Area Legal Aid
Jacksonville, FL

What about you?



Poll Everywhere

Join at

pollev.com/ejc2026

Objectives

01

What models work and which ones don't?

Analyze different short- and long-term models for law school–legal organization partnerships by comparing their strengths, weaknesses, and contextual suitability.

02

What's a strong framework for a successful partnership?

Design a draft collaboration framework that aligns academic calendars, pro bono program structures, and institutional requirements to support sustainable student engagement.

03

What do today's law students care about?

Evaluate strategies for recruiting and retaining law students who are committed to justice work, based on what today's students value and organizational needs.

Today's Session

I.

Welcome & Framing the Conversation



II.

Law Schools as Pro Bono Partners



III.

Engaging Students and Building the Pro Bono Pipeline



IV.

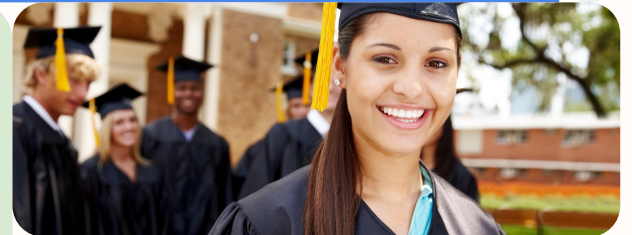
Challenges, Collaboration, and Innovation



The class of 2025 contributed more than **5.1 million hours in legal services** as part of their legal education.

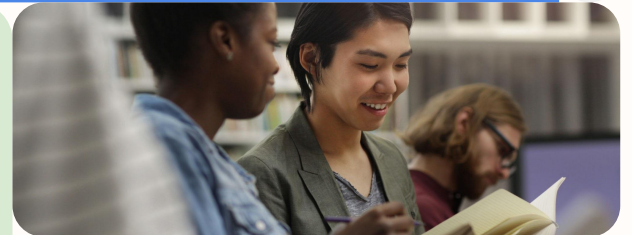
This is an average of about **230 hours per student**.

2025 Association of American Law Schools
Law Student Pro Bono Hours Report



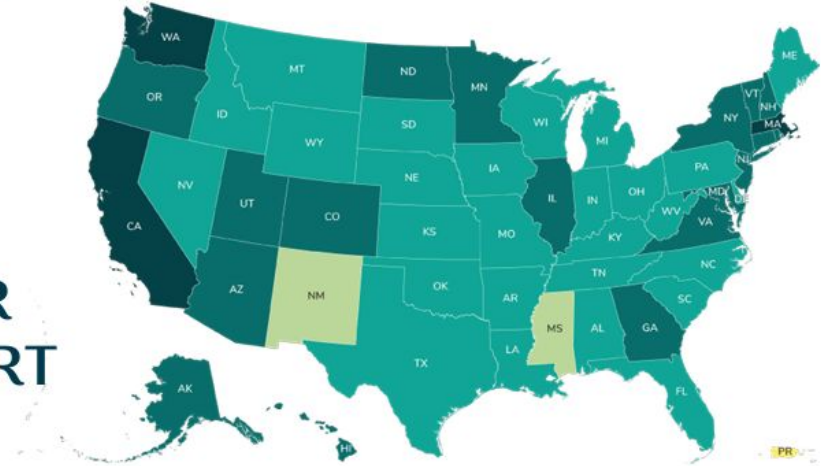
- Value of volunteer time: ~**\$34.79 an hour**
- Total value of the students' time at these schools: **Over \$178 million**
- The schools represent approximately **60% of the students in American Bar Association accredited law schools** in the class of 2025.

2025 Association of American Law Schools
Law Student Pro Bono Hours Report



Independent Sector

2026 VALUE OF VOLUNTEER TIME REPORT



2025 Value of Volunteer Time



	2025*	2024	2023	2022
US Total	\$36.14	\$34.79	\$33.49	\$31.80
Alabama	\$31.83	\$30.59	\$29.82	\$28.38
Alaska	\$38.37	\$37.13	\$35.51	\$33.60
Arizona	\$35.27	\$33.70	\$32.07	\$30.13
Arkansas	\$30.13	\$29.09	\$27.74	\$25.66
California	\$41.75	\$40.14	\$38.61	\$37.32
Colorado	\$39.99	\$38.74	\$36.36	\$34.36
Connecticut	\$39.67	\$38.43	\$36.44	\$34.56
Delaware	\$33.36	\$32.21	\$31.16	\$29.56
District of Columbia	\$54.77	\$52.06	\$50.88	\$50.00

	2025*	2024	2023	2022
Montana	\$33.19	\$32.15	\$30.84	\$27.87
Nebraska	\$33.07	\$31.96	\$31.07	\$29.50
Nevada	\$32.49	\$30.86	\$29.76	\$28.50
New Hampshire	\$35.96	\$35.76	\$34.64	\$32.54
New Jersey	\$38.59	\$36.97	\$35.50	\$33.82
New Mexico	\$29.66	\$28.69	\$27.38	\$26.95
New York	\$39.50	\$38.48	\$37.29	\$35.71
North Carolina	\$34.34	\$33.01	\$31.64	\$29.86
North Dakota	\$35.13	\$34.40	\$33.34	\$30.69
Ohio	\$33.54	\$32.42	\$31.18	\$29.17

Who are today's law students?

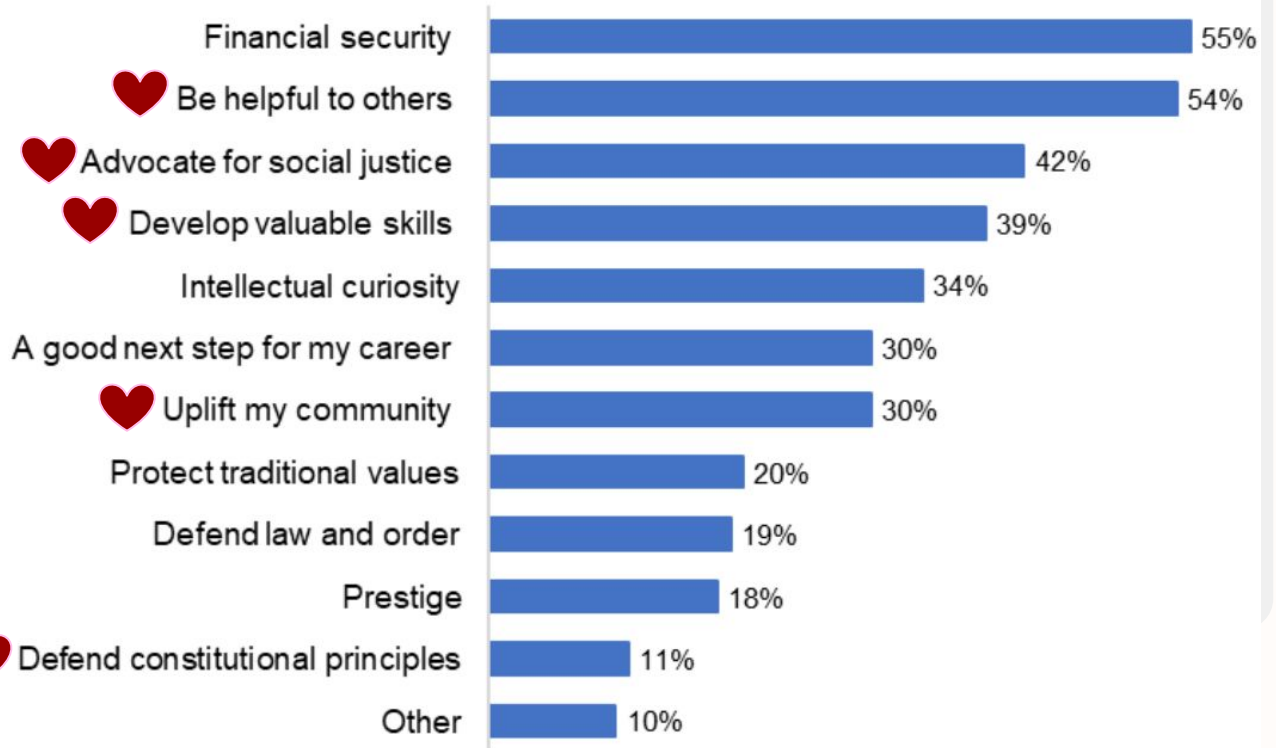
- Record number of law school applicants in 2024-2025 admissions cycle
- 42,723 students started 1L in 2025

The Composition of the First-Year Law School Class and Enrollment 2021-2025 Trends

Who are today's law students?

[LSAC's Knowledge Report The 2024-25 Law School Applicant Profile](#)

Figure 9. 2024-25 Applicant Survey: Top Ranked Motivations to Attend Law School



Note: Data in this figure are distributions of the top three ranked motivation statements.
Source: 2024-25 LSAC Applicant Survey.

5 Practical Takeaways for Building Effective Pro Bono Academic Partnerships

Most law schools require or strongly encourage pro bono, meaning there is a consistent pool of students looking for opportunities.

- Pro bono hours for law students may be:
 - Required (graduation and/or bar admission condition)
 - Strongly encouraged (with incentives/awards)
- Work must generally serve low-income or underserved communities and be law-related
- Students want to know who they're helping and where they can make an impact

1

5 Practical Takeaways for Building Effective Pro Bono Academic Partnerships

Partnership success depends on aligning with academic realities.

- Student availability is shaped by:
 - Classes
 - Semester timelines, exams, and breaks
 - Credit vs. non-credit commitments
 - Involvement in extracurricular activities
- Law schools often screen and approve pro bono placements before students can participate. Employer eligibility review, confirmation of a licensed attorney supervisor, defined scope of work that is law-related and appropriate for students.

5 Practical Takeaways for Building Effective Pro Bono Academic Partnerships

Student expertise and interests are shaped by:

- **1Ls:** Early-stage training; strong interest in exposure and skill-building; best suited for structured, supervised roles (intake, research, observation with guided tasks)
- **2Ls:** Increased legal skills and confidence; often seeking hands-on experience tied to career interests; strong candidates for externships, clinics, and summer placements

2

5 Practical Takeaways for Building Effective Pro Bono Academic Partnerships

Student expertise and interests are shaped by:

- **3Ls:** More advanced and practice-ready; able to take on greater responsibility and continuity (case support, leadership roles, mentoring junior students)
- **LL.M students:** Often bring prior legal training or international experience; valuable for research, comparative analysis, and specialized projects, but may have shorter timelines

5 Practical Takeaways for Building Effective Pro Bono Academic Partnerships

The most effective partnerships are mutually beneficial and designed for both an organization's impact and student learning.

From the **law school perspective**, strong partners offer:

- Hands-on legal work (not just observation)
- Supervision and mentorship
- Exposure to clients and real-world impact
- Clear schedules and responsibilities for the student(s)
- Others?

From the **legal aid /partner perspective**, strong law schools offer:

- Reliable, trained, and prepared students
- High-quality work product
- Others?

5 Practical Takeaways for Building Effective Pro Bono Academic Partnerships

Pro bono can be both service and a pipeline strategy.

Early exposure (especially 1L year) shapes:

- Career interests
- Commitment to public interest work

Legal aid organizations can:

- Build continuity pathways (service /pro bono program → externship or internship → post-grad)

Law schools can:

- Reinforce long-term engagement, not just one-time participation

5 Practical Takeaways for Building Effective Pro Bono Academic Partnerships

Start small, design intentionally, and build toward sustainability

The most successful partnerships often begin with:

- A pilot event or discrete project
- Clear scope, supervision, and expectations

Then evolve into:

- Recurring programs or embedded placements

Key ingredients for growth:

- Feedback loops (students + partners)
- Flexibility (remote/hybrid options, varied time commitments)
- Equity-centered design (who is being served and who can participate)

5

Justice in New York: A Pro Bono Working Lunch



CLE
Materials
Sample
Collaborative
Model:
“Student +
Attorney Pro
Bono Teams”

Tested Collaboration Models

Session Materials

- Summary: Short- & Long-Term Partnership Models
- Examples:
 - ◆ St. John's Law Pro Bono Working Lunch
 - ◆ Brooklyn Law Pro Bono 2025-2026 Opportunities
 - ◆ St. John's Law & Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program
 - ◆ Brooklyn Law & Jacksonville Area Legal Aid



**The Veterans
Consortium**

PRO BONO PROGRAM
CAVC PRACTICE

Screening Memo Training

**Drafting Screening Memos Identifying
Appealable Issues at the U.S. CAVC**

Gina D'Amico, Esq.

AGENDA

- **Thank You!**
- **Who We Are and What We Do**
- **Drafting the Screening Memo**
- **Chronology of Veteran's Claim**
- **Service-Connected Disability Compensation**
- **Commonly Raised Errors and Arguments**
- **Q&A**

Supporting TVC Volunteers

- Screen final decisions from the Board of Veterans Appeals to identify meritorious arguments
- Write a screening memo
- Training Materials
- Mentor Attorney
- Sample Document Database
- The Veterans Benefits Manual
- Malpractice Insurance
- Pro Hac Vice Status (1st case only)

Drafting the Screening Memo

- Assigned Board Decision with Error
- Assigned Mentor to Assist
- Sample Annotated Screening Memo





How to Spend Your Time This Week

Training

Take at Least an Hour Individually to Read and Understand Board Decision & Annotated Screening Memo

Meet with Assigned Mentor Directly After Reading Board Decision to Discuss Board Decision Errors and Pertinent Case Law

Meet With Mentor Again to Finetune Issues Before Drafting

Draft memo due to Mentor by end of day Wednesday

Mentor will return draft to you with notes. Final drafts due to mentor on Friday



BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS
FOR THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

IN THE APPEAL OF

████████████████████
Represented by
████████████████████

████████████████████
Docket No. ██████████
Advanced on the Docket

DATE: December 20, 2023

ORDER

As the Veteran did not file a timely notice of disagreement (NOD) with a July 2014 rating decision, the appeal as to the timeliness of the NOD is denied.

FINDING OF FACT

The Veteran filed an NOD with the July 2014 rating decision in May 2018 and there is no evidence that he was not timely notified of the decision or his appellate rights or that he had good cause for an extension of the one year time limit for filing a NOD.

CONCLUSION OF LAW

The criteria are not met to warrant a finding of a timely NOD or good cause for an extension of the filing deadline. 38 U.S.C. §§ 7105, 5107; 38 C.F.R. §§ 3.109, 19.20, 19.50, 19.52.

**Sample
BVA
Decision**

ANNOTATED SCREENING MEMO TEMPLATE

Name:

Court docket no.

Memorandum of:

Date:

Screening Time:

Veteran:

Court Docket #:

BVA Decision:

Notice of Appeal:

Appeals System: [Legacy]¹[AMA]²

Reconsideration: N/A

Timely:

Equitable Tolling: N/A

BVA Judge:

Recommendation: Place

Issue(s):

HEADLINE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is one claim at issue in this appeal.³ The Veteran served on active duty from [] to []

IDEAL VOLUNTEER PROFILE

[]-level

¹ A new appeals system, the Appeals Modernization Act (AMA) was implemented on February 19, 2019. Pub. L. No.

Samantha Higgs ... Date you completed the memo.
@mention or reply

Samantha Higgs ... Record the number of hours it took you to screen the case here.
@mention or reply

Samantha Higgs ... Add a line under the veteran's name that says "Appellant" if the appellant is not the veteran. We want both names.
@mention or reply

Samantha Higgs ... The Board will indicate if the case was adjudicated under the AMA system. If there is no discussion of what system, then typically you can assume that the case was adjudicated under the legacy
@mention or reply

Samantha Higgs ... Only relevant if the veteran filed for reconsideration at the Board.
@mention or reply

Samantha Higgs ... Yes if NOA is 120 days or less from Board decision. If more than 120 days, say "No" but drop this footnote:

ANNOTATED SCREENING MEMO TEMPLATE

BACKGROUND

The Veteran, appeals a , Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board or BVA) decision. The Veteran filed a timely Notice of Appeal on _____. [The Board determined as a conclusion of law that _____. Record Before the Agency (R.) at _____.] The Veteran served on active duty from _____ to _____. The Court has jurisdiction over this appeal pursuant to 38 U.S.C. §§ 7252(a) and 7266(a).

The record available for screening review is limited at this time to the Board's decision and does not include the Record Before the Agency. This will be electronically transmitted to the volunteer once it is received.

–OR–

The Record Before the Agency (RBA) was received and reviewed during the screening process. While no basis for a dispute was identified by the screener, the volunteer is responsible for conducting an independent and thorough review of the record.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS⁴

CONCLUSION⁵

⁴ The purpose of the Screening Memorandum is to advise on whether there is at least one colorable argument that allows the program to place the case with a volunteer attorney. The issue(s) addressed may differ from those in the Board decision. There may be (and often are) legal issues other than that or those appropriate for the Screening Memorandum. Mentors may be able to help determine other issues and legal theories. However, this is ultimately the volunteer's responsibility.

⁵ Note that the term "conclusion" is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations at 38 CFR § 3.261(d)(1).



Samantha Higgs



Mimic the Conclusion(s) of Law section of the BVA dec.

@mention or reply



Samantha Higgs



If you do not have the RBA, you should cite to "BVA Dec. at ____."

@mention or reply

SAMPLE SCREENING MEMO

Name: [REDACTED] Court docket no: [REDACTED] Memorandum of Lihb Avery
Date: January 28, 2025 Screening Time: 5 hours
Veteran: [REDACTED]
Court Docket #: [REDACTED]
BVA Decision: October 16, 2024 NOA: December 17, 2024
Reconsideration: N/A Timely: Yes
Equitable Tolling: N/A BVA Judge: K. Conner
Recommendation: Place Appeals System: AMA¹
Issue(s): Whether the Board erred when it failed to provide an adequate statement of reasons or bases in denying entitlement to an initial rating of 10 percent, but no higher, for prostatitis.

HEADLINE

[REDACTED] The Board Erred When It Failed to Provide an Adequate Statement of Reasons or Bases in Denying Entitlement to an initial rating of 10 percent, but no higher, for prostatitis.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are two claims at issue in this appeal.² However, this Memorandum presents only one potential argument. The Veteran served on active duty, in the United States Air Force, from February 1969 to February 1991. The Board erred when it failed to provide an adequate statement of reasons or bases in denying entitlement to an initial rating of 10 percent, but no higher, for prostatitis. Specifically, the Board failed to reconcile conflicting opinions as rendering its decision.

IDEAL VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Intermediate-level

¹ A new appeals system, the Appeals Modernization Act (AMA) was implemented on February 19, 2019. Pub. L. No. 115-55, 131 Stat. 1105. According to the Board, the Appellant's case is an appeal from a Board Decision Review Request, governed by the AMA, and the Appellant selected Direct Review.

² The Court does not have jurisdiction over remanded claims. 38 C.F.R. § 20.1100(b). *Howard v. Gobet*, 220 F.3d 1341, 1344 (Fed. Cir. 2006); *Browder v. Principi*, 17 Vet. App. 475, 478 (2004) (per curiam). In addition, the Court cannot deny the Board's favorable determination. See, e.g., *Dobson v. Platter*, 13 Vet. App. 232, 236 n.1 (2019).

Name: [REDACTED] Court docket no: [REDACTED] Memorandum of Lihb Avery

BACKGROUND

The Veteran, Mr. [REDACTED], appeals an October 16, 2024, Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board or BVA) decision. The Veteran filed a timely Notice of Appeal on December 17, 2024. The Board determined as a conclusion of law that: (1) the July 1994 rating decision denying service connection for prostatitis is final, (2) the criteria for an effective date earlier than November 14, 2018, for the award of service connection for prostatitis have not been met, and (3) the criteria for an initial rating of 10 percent, but not higher, for prostatitis have been met. Board of Veterans' Appeals Decision (BVA Dec.) at 2. Mr. [REDACTED] served on active duty, in the United States Air Force, from February 1969 to February 1991. *Id.* The Court has jurisdiction over this appeal pursuant to 38 U.S.C. §§ 7252(a) and 7266(a).

The record available for screening review is limited at this time to the Board's decision and does not include the Record Before the Agency. This will be electronically transmitted to the Volunteer once it is received.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS³

In rendering its decision, the Board is required to provide a written statement of the reasons or bases for its findings and conclusions on all material issues of fact and law presented on the record. 38 U.S.C. § 7104(d)(1). The statement must be adequate to enable a claimant to understand the precise basis for the Board's decision, as well as to facilitate review by the Court. See *Gilbert v. Derwinski*, 1 Vet. App. 49, 57 (1990). A bare

³ The purpose of the Screening Memorandum is to advise on whether there is at least one colorable argument that allows the program to place the case with a volunteer attorney. The issue(s) addressed may differ from those in the Board decision. There may be one or more legal issues other than that or those appropriate for the Screening Memorandum. Screeners may be able to help determine other issues and legal theories. However, this is ultimately the Volunteer's responsibility.

Name: [REDACTED] Court docket no: [REDACTED] Memorandum of Lihb Avery

conclusionary statement, without supporting analysis and explanation, is neither helpful to the veteran nor in compliance with statutory requirements. *Id.* To comply with this requirement, the Board must analyze the credibility and probative value of the evidence, account for the evidence that it finds to be persuasive or unpersuasive, and provide reasons for its rejection of any material evidence favorable to the claimant. See *Calica v. Brown*, 7 Vet. App. 498, 506 (1995); *Moore v. Derwinski*, 1 Vet. App. 401, 404 (1991). The mere listing of evidence is not an adequate statement of reasoning. See *Dennis v. Nicholson*, 21 Vet. App. 18, 22 (2007).

The Board's assessment of the credibility and weight to be given to evidence is a finding of fact that the Court reviews under the "clearly erroneous" standard of review. 38 U.S.C. § 7261(a)(4); *Wood v. Derwinski*, 1 Vet. App. 190, 193 (1991). Remand is appropriate where the Board has incorrectly applied the law, failed to provide an adequate statement of reasons or bases for its determinations, or where the record is otherwise inadequate. See *Tucker v. West*, 11 Vet. App. 369, 374 (1998).

As background, the Veteran's prostatitis is rated under Diagnostic Code 7525, which provides that the disability is rated as a urinary tract infection, except for tubercular infections, which are to be rated under 38 C.F.R. §§ 4.88b or 4.89. BVA Dec. at 7.

Here, the Veteran argued that he is entitled to an increased rating for prostatitis. BVA Dec. 8-13. The Board found that an initial rating of 10 percent, but no higher, for prostatitis is warranted for the entire period on appeal. BVA Dec. at 8. However, the Board erred when it failed to provide an adequate statement of reasons or bases in denying the Veteran's claim for entitlement. Specifically, the Board failed to reconcile conflicting



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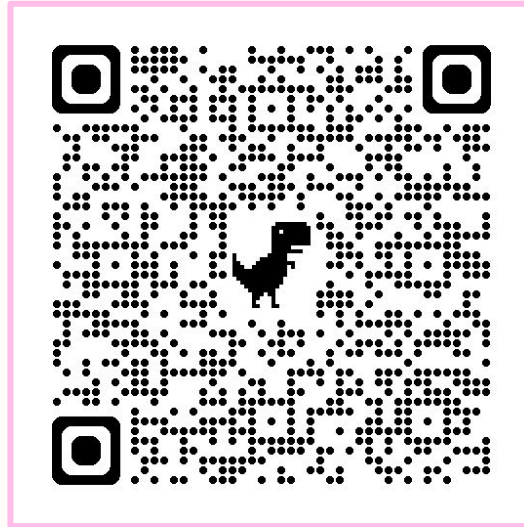
THANK YOU!

Gina D'Amico, Esq.

Challenges, Collaboration, and Innovation

ABA Directory of Law School Public Interest & Pro Bono Programs

This Directory is intended to help individual law schools meet the expectations of the ABA and the AALS and to develop strong pro bono and public interest programs. It is also designed to assist prospective law students interested in public interest and pro bono programs to find the law school that best matches their interests. This is not intended as a referral source for direct legal representation.



Let's Connect

New contact information

Aaron's successor:

Stacey DeLuca

Director of Pro Bono and FLARE

Stacey.DeLuca@jaxlegalaid.org

Amy Hsieh



**Executive Director,
Public Service Law Center &
Adjunct Professor**
Brooklyn Law School
amy.hsieh@brooklaw.edu

**Jeanne
Ortiz-Ortiz**



**Director | DiMartino/Smith
Public Interest Center &
Adjunct Professor**
St. John's University School
of Law
ortizorj@stjohns.edu

Gina D'Amico



**Deputy Director, Case
Evaluation & Litigation,
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The Veterans Consortium
Pro Bono Program
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Aaron J. Irving



General Magistrate, State of
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Jacksonville Area Legal Aid
Aaron.Irving@jaxlegalaid.org