



# NEVADA LEGAL SERVICES

Recipient Number 829050

## APPLICANT PAI PLAN FOR 2022



### I. Who We Are

#### 1. Nevada Legal Services

Nevada Legal Services (NLS) has a mission to strengthen the community by ensuring fairness and providing equal access to justice for low-income Nevadans. NLS is the only statewide provider of legal services in Nevada and serves Nevadans in every county. For more than 40 years NLS has worked to provide equal access to justice and help clients gain access to housing, healthcare, income, economic security, and forge a new path for their future. We have offices across the state to meet the needs of low-income Nevadans, seniors, veterans, indigenous peoples, farmworkers and more. NLS leverages our limited resources to provide pro bono volunteers to help additional clients across all of our practice areas and beyond.

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## **2. Pro Bono Program Mission**

Nevada Legal Services strives to meet the needs of all low-income and eligible persons throughout the State of Nevada by providing maximal civil legal assistance. This is to be facilitated by fostering and nurturing meaningful partnerships with the private bar and other professions of the legal and social services community.

## **3. Pro Bono Program Description**

**a. Clinics and Ask A Lawyers.** NLS provides a regular schedule of Ask a Lawyers on a monthly or weekly basis across Nevada. This is generally our starting point when clients contact us. We look to have a least one attorney volunteer for each event to talk with our clients about their legal issues. After the Ask A Lawyers, the client may have all of the information they need, or that we can provide at that time, or there may be issues the pro bono attorney spots that result in a referral of the case for further assistance. The Ask a Lawyers may also contain a self-help forms pro se clinic component where the participants also complete pro se forms to file with the court.

There are 4 regular Family Law Ask a Lawyers in Reno every month as well as an estate planning, consumer and employment Ask a Lawyer. The Carson, Yerington and Elko offices provide either general, family law or estate planning Ask A Lawyers on a monthly basis across northern Nevada. In southern Nevada we hold monthly Ask a Lawyers in Pahrump and Laughlin as well as rotating topical Ask a Lawyers 3 times a month in Las Vegas. As all of our programs moved to virtual service in 2020 and 2021, we have leveraged our ability to provide services statewide to ensure that those waiting for an appointment can speak with an attorney at any of our statewide events via Zoom or telephone. While we do anticipate moving back to in person events post-COVID, we will also keep virtual events in jurisdictions where that was a particular success, such as Carson City, but also keep those options open to ensure we can leverage our resources to help as many individuals as possible.

### **b. Case Placement and the Judicare Program.**

Case Placement. Although Nevada Legal Services encourages volunteers to provide advice and brief service to a high volume of clients through regular Law Fairs, clinics and seminars, NLS also maintains a case placement list to match pro bono attorneys with eligible clients. Volunteer lawyers are therefore essential in providing direct representation to people in the most need of assistance in targeted legal areas. Nevada Legal Services attempts placement of cases in the following areas: bankruptcy and consumer matters, VAWA Petitions/U and T Visas, name and gender marker changes, criminal record sealing, eviction record sealing, employment discrimination, estate planning and probate, guardianships, and other family-law matters.

Judicare. In the face of the COVID pandemic, and the extraordinary circumstances facing Nevadans across the state, NLS also revamped our Judicare program in 2020 to greatly expand the cases that we placed as well as increased the hourly fee we paid to attorneys on our Reduced Fee Panel. NLS traditionally leverages our pro bono resources to aid in family law matters because of the struggle we have faced to find pro bono attorneys willing to take on long

term divorce and custody matters. Based on a survey of volunteers reporting their hourly rate, we were able to increase the rate we paid to \$150 an hour for Judicare cases (1/2 the average hourly rate for attorneys in Nevada).

As we move back to more normal circumstances for 2022, the Judicare budget for the 2022 calendar year will be \$130,000. We will refocus our Reduced Fee Panel to entice and reward attorneys for taking otherwise difficult to place cases. The two case types identified as particularly difficult to place are family law and guardianship cases. Due to the limited nature of the Judicare funds, a case will be labeled Judicare only as a last resort. We will make three (3) placement attempts as a pro bono case, at which time a case will become eligible for placement via Judicare. Such cases will be reviewed to determine the suitability of the case for placement in the Reduced Fee Panel Program and likelihood of success without attorney involvement. Should multiple attorneys be interested at the same time, then preference will be shown for the attorney with a greater involvement in the pro bono program (e.g. having taken at least one case within the last 6 months in a pro bono capacity).

**c. The Path of a Pro Bono Case.**

Intake. NLS conducts intakes on all interested applicants to screen the prospective client for eligibility and assessment of whether the case is appropriate for an Ask A Lawyer or Clinic or immediate placement with a pro bono volunteer.

Training. NLS provides a multitude of training resources for pro bono volunteers. We host monthly CLEs on key topics in the types of cases we place. These trainings have been highly successful as virtual events through Zoom and we provide CLE credit as an approved CLE provider with the state bar. We additionally host Roundtable events in the same topic as the next month's Law Fair. The Roundtables are a more intimate forum for pro bono volunteers to ask experts about their current cases or to discuss the topics of upcoming events.

Placement. Cases that have been screened and identified for either immediate placement or identified as needing further assistance through our Ask A Lawyer programs are put on our case placement list. These lists are sent out to volunteers as emails at least once a month. The emails are sent to attorneys based on the location of the client and the attorney's main office of practice. If cases are not taken from our regular placement emails, attorneys will be contacted directly, focusing on those attorneys that have attended one of our CLEs or other trainings for free on the condition that they accept a pro bono case for placement. In special circumstances or emergency matters, attorneys may also be contacted directly by phone or email.

Supervision and Follow Up. Our staff at NLS provide technical support and supervision of our pro bono cases. Staff will regularly follow up with pro bono attorneys and professional volunteers at least every 90 days to determine if additional assistance is needed, to ensure compliance with our grant funders, to get regular updates on Judicare invoicing, and to determine outcomes of all cases placed. NLS also provides mentors from our staff attorneys or more experienced volunteers in the community for newer attorneys or those taking cases in new areas of law. At the conclusion of a case, staff will ask pro bono volunteers for a Case Closing Memo as well as any final Judicare invoices.

#### **d. Pro Bono Programs**

Partners in Pro Bono. The northern offices have partnered with the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and the UNLV Boyd School of Law to partner law students who are now taking virtual classes from the northern areas of Nevada with a pro bono volunteer mentor. The law student is assigned a pro bono case and works on the case with the pro bono volunteer. We hope to recruit additional law students and attorney mentors to expand this program to encourage pro bono law student volunteers in the North where we have no law school and available pool of law student volunteers.

Street Law. In 2020, we received a grant to implement a Street Law project in Washoe County. We entered into a partnership with the Children's Cabinet to provide training to staff and pro bono volunteers on the Street Law curriculum. We were unable to implement the program until this fall due to COVID and we are currently meeting with Children's Cabinet to discuss planning for the 2022 program in light of the Children's Cabinet school schedule moving forward. The plan is to have a presentation twice a month for 2022.

Estate Planning for Seniors in Rural Nevada: Serving Seniors. Other than last year when COVID interrupted our normal schedule, we have traditionally hosted a Serving Seniors event in partnership with the State Bar Young Lawyer's program to provide estate planning services to seniors across the state and in their local communities. We provide on site pro bono volunteers at Senior Centers across Nevada to provide an estate planning document for the client at the event or, if more follow up is needed, assist the pro bono attorney in completing the estate plan after the event.

Veterans and Active Military Members @EASE Outreach. Since 2016, in partnership with the Attorney General's Office of Military Legal Assistance (OMLA), NLS and the OMLA have hosted monthly events throughout Nevada in which Pro Bono Attorneys offer free legal assistance to active duty military members or veterans. This is known as Project @EASE and it was awarded the Best Pro Bono Project in the United States by the Department of Defense in 2018. Services provided include estate planning, landlord/tenant issues, consumer and family law. In 2018 and 2019, NLS and OMLA partnered with the Veterans Administration hospitals in Las Vegas and Reno to hold quarterly events where we provided free wills and legal advice to veterans. We were only able to provide one OMLA event before the events for the rest of the year were cancelled due to COVID. We plan on conducting a meeting with the OMLA staff to determine whether we can hold in person events in Spring and Fall 2022.

Community Law Fairs. NLS aids Nevadans in every county. To ensure assistance to individuals in rural communities with limited resources, we host a number of law fairs in rural areas and recruit pro bono volunteers in those local communities as well as volunteers from surrounding communities to assist in our provision of legal services across the state. Unfortunately, due to COVID, we were not able to host the number of Community Law Fairs we had planned in 2020 and 2021. Instead, we turned to statewide telephonic and now video Community Law Fairs. We incorporated Zoom into our Law Fair model to provide one on one experience for clients with their pro bono attorneys. We focused on in person community law fairs in 2021 during Pro Bono Week and partnered with our legal aid partners, WLS and VARN, in

Reno and Carson City. For 2022, we will hold Law Fairs on various topics every other month and recruit attorneys and clients across the state. We will also plan to incorporate virtual Roundtables to provide an avenue for substantive training in coordination with the Law Fairs to the extent possible.

Pro Bono Month. October is Pro Bono Month at NLS. During this month NLS will offer special recruitment lunches, CLEs, legal education classes for the public, and other opportunities for attorneys to volunteer. These activities will culminate with a two-day Pro Bono Summit in October. This summit will bring together private firms and legal services providers to talk about best practices for pro bono cases and events and also potentially provide more substantive training on hot topics or emerging issues to make pro bono services engaging and relevant. These presentations will include CLEs on the ethics of pro bono representation, seminars on how to interact with and counsel pro bono clients, as well as substantive CLEs on issues facing low-income clients.

Community Education Events. NLS also engages our pro bono volunteers to provide legal education and pro se clinics to the communities we serve. Due to the COVID pandemic, we had to stop our prolific in person educational seminars. Instead, we created a YouTube channel and began providing live streamed educational seminars on a variety of topics. Educational topics include bankruptcy, criminal record sealing, eviction sealing, powers of attorney, wills, probate, minor guardianship, the foreclosure process and small claims. We additionally will reinstate our partnership with the library system in southern Nevada to present educational seminars at the West Charleston and Green Valley libraries on a variety of topics.

e. **Recognition of Pro Bono Partners.** NLS celebrates our partners and honors our pro bono volunteers at our annual Champions of Justice events. We host yearly events in Reno and Las Vegas and every other year in Elko or Winnemucca. The events are generally held in October or around Pro Bono Month although we held our 2021 event in August. NLS enjoys recognizing and awarding our wonderful volunteers every year in a relaxed and celebratory atmosphere. Aside from the awards we also submit a monthly report to the State Bar of Nevada for the honor roll – a list of volunteer attorneys in the monthly issue of the Nevada Lawyer.



## II. Pro Bono Goals 2022

1. **Virtual CLE Programming.** One of our main takeaways from the COVID pandemic was that virtual CLEs were a success. We will continue this model into the future by leveraging our pro bono partners across the state to educate and provide training to all of our volunteers in our main practice areas. We will also conduct smaller CLEs in-person in rural communities.

2. **Moving back to in person client services.** While attorneys and our professional partners have the resources to engage with our programs virtually, often our clients do not. We have already begun opening our pro bono programs back to in person service with our Pro Bono Week events. We will continue to reengage our client populations with in person events and continue to recruit volunteers to join us at those events while also allowing our partners to participate in our programs virtually with our technological resources.

### 3. Development of New Programs

a. Lawyer in the School. In the North, the Indian Law Project began a Lawyer in the School Program in partnership with Natchez Elementary School and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe. Our project attorneys would staff an Ask A Lawyer at the school once a month to answer questions from parents of the school students. This project was put on hold due to COVID. We have asked our pro bono volunteers to assist us with the program next year. We are currently in the process of reaching out to our law firm partners to volunteer at the schools in order to provide advice and representation of parents with children in schools in disadvantaged communities. In the south, we have been working on getting the Lawyer in School program started at Myrtle Tate Elementary and are working on a partnership with Hutchison & Steffen in Las Vegas. In the north we are currently working on getting the program started at Wooster High School as well.

b. SSI/SSDI Administrative Hearings. NLS would like to expand our placement of pro bono cases to include assistance with social security disability hearings in cessation case – those where it is unlikely a private attorney would take the case due to the restriction is receiving fees. NLS has one volunteer in northern Nevada who has practiced before the Social Security Administration for decades and plans to expand the program statewide.

c. Eviction Sealing Clinics. In partnership with our Tenants' Rights Center, we will also hold in person pro se clinics to assist pro se filers with motions to seal their eviction records. Sealing records can be some of the most impactful work that we do as it allows individuals to remove significant barriers to housing and employment to give them a fresh start in their lives.

d. Expansion of the Bankruptcy 341 Clinic/Ask A Lawyer Program. In partnership with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Reno, NV we will continue to provide a Clinic/Ask a Lawyer event during the 341 meeting dates every month for pro per debtors. This program was implemented in 2020 pre COVID. We were able to conduct several events prior to the shutdown. The remainder of the 2020 events were then held virtually. The program continued into 2021 for several months but was difficult to maintain with virtual 341 meetings.

#### **4. Build Relationships with Law Firms, Casinos, Law School Clinic Programs and Partner Organizations.**

a. Recruitment of Attorneys and Professionals. We are currently focusing our recruitment of volunteers on our Lawyer in the School Program as a major project for 2022, and have reached out to large and small law firms as well as corporate legal departments in order to create as many partnerships as possible to place volunteers in the schools on a weekly basis. We also consistently need volunteers to not only take pro bono cases, but also to volunteer at our frequent Ask A Lawyer and Law Fair events. We will continue in 2022 to host lunches with our volunteers that were suspended due to COVID as well as reaching out to the Boyd School of Law clinical programs to assist with our record sealing efforts to provide meaningful experience to law students and assist our clients make positive changes in their lives.

b. Partner with Non-Profits. NLS partners with many non-profits to provide education to their client communities as well as referrals for various legal issues. Through the pro bono program, we will continue to expand our partnerships with organizations to provide legal education to their members, provide educational seminars at libraries in the Las Vegas Valley, and expand our assistance to community partners with name and gender marker clinics and case referrals. We will regularly meet with partner organizations to stay on top of the most pressing needs facing our clients and collaborate on the best ways to help our clients. In the north we plan to re-establish our family law educational seminars with Step 2, a long-term treatment facility for women facing domestic violence, substance abuse and trauma.

c. Joint Paralegal Program (JPP). NLS and Truckee Meadows Community College will continue to provide an externship opportunity for paralegal students to gain practical experience. NLS will continue to accept applications from interested students starting immediately. Interviews will occur on a rolling basis and the Pro Bono Director and Pro Bono Coordinator will interview interested candidates. Paralegal students will help eligible individuals attending Self-Help Form Clinics/Ask a Lawyers in Reno. At the clinics, the JPP volunteers will meet with eligible clients of the NLS pro bono program and help them fill out the court forms and provide direction on the court process in family law cases under attorney supervision. Alternatively, the volunteer could assist us with updating our information of pro bono volunteers and other ongoing projects as assigned if the Ask A Lawyer schedule is not feasible.

d. Training and Mentorship. NLS will provide a comprehensive training schedule and training materials in 2022 with our virtual CLEs and Roundtable discussions. We will also look to expanding our stable of mentors and ensure new attorneys and those taking cases in new areas of law are aware of our mentorship program.

e. Committees, conferences, and events. NLS will participate in key pro bono committees and conferences, including the Access to Justice Commission, the Equal Justice Conference, and bar association events and committees.

f. Co-Counseling on Impact Litigation. NLS will seek law firm partners to regularly co-counsel with NLS staff attorneys as well as solo practitioner volunteer attorneys to utilize their resources and existing skills to provide legal research, draft pleadings, conduct

discovery, and appear in court. It is difficult for NLS to take on significant litigation cases without leveraging our law firm partners to help in these efforts.

g. Recognition. NLS will also continue to provide regular recognition of our volunteers in the Nevada Lawyer as well as with the local bar associations. We will also strive to ensure all of our volunteers are recognized at our annual events and well as on a more individual basis throughout the year with monthly social media highlights.