

## Letter from the Leadership Team

Throughout 2020, even as we were suddenly immersed in a global pandemic within the already unsettling context of a nation deeply divided, Pro Bono Net has been focused and unified by the certainty that our mission has never been more important: to use innovative technology solutions and collaboration to fulfill America's promise of equal justice for all.

For over two decades, Pro Bono Net has stepped in during times of national crisis, to provide online resources to help the legal community respond with greater speed and efficacy to pressing events. Covid-19 has tested our resilience, and we have met the challenge.

Our 20-state network of LawHelp sites reached a new monthly high in visitors in April, with more than one million people in a single month using LawHelp to learn about their rights and options on issues such as unemployment benefits, rent payment and eviction, emergency public assistance and unpaid wages. The early days of the pandemic also saw a sudden uptick in use of LawHelpNY and especially our LiveHelp chat feature. Our staff worked quickly to provide updated information as the state and federal governments rolled out relief efforts, and our LiveHelp volunteers provided detailed assistance to more than 1,000 New Yorkers each month with ever more complex legal issues.

And on March 11, the same day the WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic, Pro Bono Net and 10 partner organizations published a new resource, Remote Legal Services: A Guide for Nonprofit and Pro Bono Innovation. In the context of this pandemic and the reality of social distancing, the need for this blueprint for providing remote services across the legal sector was more timely and essential than we could have imagined – and in fact, 2020 has seen all of Pro Bono Net's platforms have historic levels of usage.

In just one example, LawHelp Interactive, which enables individuals to prepare legal documents, played a vital role in ensuring those at risk of domestic partner violence could obtain protection while quarantining with their abuser.

Between June and September this year, LHI helped more than 18,500 individuals create and file free domestic violence pleadings – that's approximately 1,430 individuals per week.

And as federal policies towards our nation's immigrants became increasingly draconian, with the intent not only to harm but to incite division and even hatred, our Immigration Advocates Network ramped up its efforts to help immigrants understand their legal rights, find an affordable path to citizenship, and build economic resilience for themselves, their families, and their communities.

At the same time, we joined our voices to protesters across the country who rose up after the senseless and tragic police killing of George Floyd, the latest episode in a long legacy of pervasive violence our society has countenanced against Black Americans. Pro Bono Net's mission is to bring the power of the law to all. Yet we know that systemic racism, a lack of fairness and the unjust application of laws contribute to the pain and outrage we see expressed during marches and demonstrations in communities across the country.

Thank you to our many partners, supporters and friends who believe in our mission, support our work and share our commitment to equal justice. In the following pages, you will see more examples of how the last year has been a time of challenge and remarkable impact for Pro Bono Net. Together we can continue to create powerful new tools and collaborations to tackle pressing justice problems as we help millions of people access lifechanging legal help.

Mark O'Brien, Executive Director
Liz Keith, Director, State & National Justice Communities
Rodrigo Camarena, Director, Immigration Advocates Network

Veronica Dunlap, Director, New York Programs









## **Mission Statement**

Pro Bono Net works to bring the power of the law to all by building cutting-edge digital tools and fostering collaborations with the nation's leading civil legal organizations.

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### 20 YEAR MILESTONE IN ACCESS TO JUSTICE



In 2019, Pro Bono Net marked its 20th anniversary. While our work to increase access to justice for the vulnerable in society through innovative uses of technology and collaboration has grown and evolved over the past two decades, our commitment to those we serve has remained constant.

In October 2019, White & Case hosted Pro Bono Net's 20th Anniversary Celebration. We used this festive event as an opportunity to engage our supporters and partners in conversations about new strategies to bring the power of the law to all. The keynote address was delivered by Microsoft's Brad Smith who spoke about "closing the gap" of supply and demand in legal services. Brad was followed by lawyer and

disability rights advocate, Haben Girma, the first deafblind woman to graduate from Harvard Law School. Haben shared her inspirational belief that "anything can be made accessible."

Also of note was our panel discussion "Funding Access to Justice: Can New Innovations in Legal Financing Close the Justice Gap?" The discussion was facilitated by Judge Shira A. Scheindlin and included panelists Heidi Dorow, Ralph Sutton and Benjamin Elga. Many thanks to all who participated and have supported Pro Bono Net over the past 20 years.

















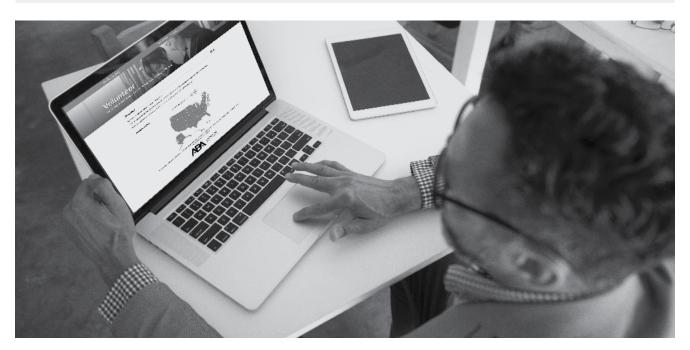
### Probono.net

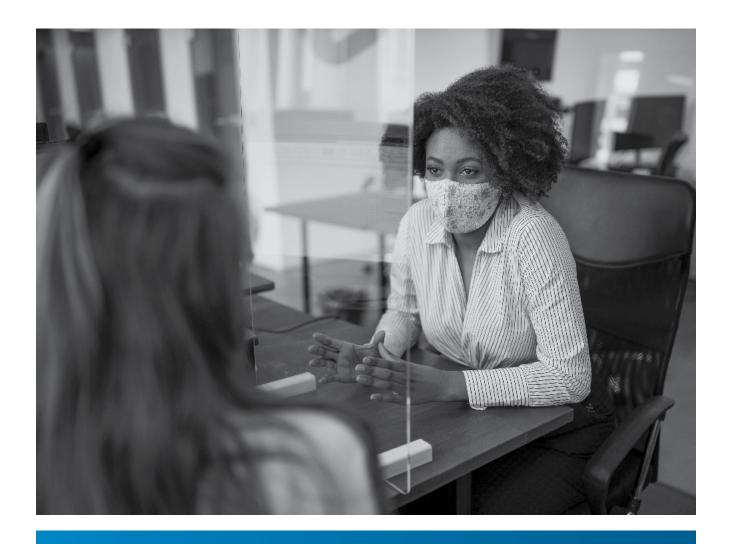
Our flagship program, probono.net, strengthens the traditional lawyer-driven model that allows individuals to exercise their rights on complex issues. Our membership of more than 120,000 encompasses legal aid advocates, pro bono attorneys, law students and volunteers committed to ensuring that low-income and vulnerable communities have equal access to justice. Probono.net provides volunteers one-stop access to pro bono opportunities, training materials and practice resources to help attorneys take on cases with confidence, even in unfamiliar areas of the law.

## **Highlights**

On March 12, 2020, the day before the federal emergency declaration, Pro Bono Net co-hosted the first national COVID-19 legal response conference call in the country, bringing together nearly 200 legal aid, law firm, and national justice community stakeholders from across our network and beyond to discuss legal needs that were likely to emerge from the pandemic. A week later, as shelter-in-place orders were starting to take effect, we held a follow up call of this nascent network to share strategies and tools to support remote and emergency service delivery. The resources, experience, and connections

forged in these early forums became crucial catalysts for additional regional and national response efforts in the months to come. And during the spring and summer of 2020, our staff were called on to serve as trainers in more than a dozen regional and national legal services community webinars, reaching more than 5,000 advocates across the country with vital information about rapid response, pro bono mobilization, and technology strategies to provide critical legal assistance to communities most affected by the economic, health, and social impact of Covid-19.





## LawHelp.org

LawHelp.org, Pro Bono Net's network of statewide legal information portals in 25 states, helps low-income individuals learn about their legal rights, access self-advocacy tools, and find trusted legal aid programs in their local area. More than 20,000 people use the LawHelp network's resources each day to find solutions to their legal issues in areas such as preserving family stability, maintaining suitable housing, and overcoming debt. LawHelp.org was developed and is maintained by Pro Bono Net in partnership with hundreds of nonprofit legal aid, pro bono, court-based programs and community organizations across the country.

## **Highlights**

In 2020, more than 8.5 million people accessed a legal rights resource in the 25-state LawHelp Network, an 18.5% increase over 2019. Highly trafficked resources included information about unemployment benefits, rent payment and eviction resources, emergency public assistance, public health-related information, and, in certain regions, information about protester rights during encounters with the police. Throughout the pandemic, usage also surged to legal rights resources in languages other than English.

## LawHelp Interactive

LawHelp Interactive hosts over 5,000 free legal forms that people without lawyers can use to prepare their own legal documents and pleadings online for free. It is also used by legal aid advocates, pro bono attorneys, and court systems to make the process of creating legal forms easier and faster, and to help ensure our justice system works for people of all income levels.

In 2019, LawHelp Interactive served over 1M interviews, resulting in more than 660,00 legal documents and court forms assembled. This was the highest volume year in the platform's history, and the first time over 600,000 assemblies were completed in a single year. In spite of widespread court and legal services agency closures from mid-March 2020 onward, LHI played a key role in ensuring access to justice for vulnerable communities impacted by the pandemic.

LawHelp Interactive was a
2020 recipient of an inaugural
American Legal Technology
Award in the Technology
category, recognizing
"technology applied in a new
or novel way in the legal
industry that achieves a
significant benefit."

At a moment when there's widespread interest across the legal sector in technology's potential to close the justice gap, LHI is already serving more than a million people a year.

"LawHelp Interactive has done an amazing job of demonstrating how technology can help improve access to justice and is a shining example of how we can create scalable solutions for people that need legal help through technology."

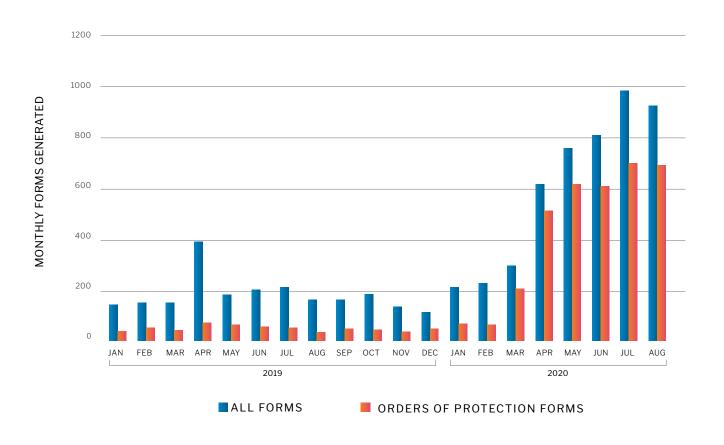
Jack Newton, Pro Bono Net Board member and CEO & co-founder of Clio

2020 American Legal Technology Award





## ORDERS OF PROTECTION FORMS DRIVE INCREASE IN LHI FORMS GENERATED IN WASHINGTON, DC DURING COVID-19



## **Highlights**

## Empowering victims of domestic violence in Washington, D.C.

In 2019, legal services organizations were already seeing an increase in domestic violence matters nationwide, with more than 137,000 cases handled by Legal Services Corporation-funded agencies. In response, Pro Bono Net's technology was taking root in District of Columbia Courts, helping individuals navigate the process to address their circumstances and protect themselves.

In 2020, domestic violence became a fullblown public health crisis emerging in parallel to Covid-19, when those experiencing domestic partner violence faced even greater risk quarantining with their abuser. Because the DC Courts already had Pro Bono Net's document assembly technology in place, they were able to quickly pivot to provide remote court services during the pandemic. Between June and September, more than 18,500 domestic violence pleadings were created and filed through LawHelp Interactive, meaning 1,430 vulnerable individuals were able to obtain protection each week.

Helping people where they are – rather than forcing them to travel to and physically navigate the courts for fairly routine filings – is what LawHelp Interactive's interview and document assembly services aim to do.

## **Immigration Advocates Network**

The Immigration Advocates Network (IAN), co-founded by Pro Bono Net with leading immigrants' rights organizations, is the country's largest network of nonprofit immigration advocates, organizers, and service providers with more than 8,000 members. IAN develops collaborative, authoritative, and free resources and trainings to increase the capacity of the nonprofit immigration legal sector. IAN also develops award-winning online tools such as Citizenshipworks, immi, and mobile apps to help immigrants understand their rights and options, and to connect with qualified legal help to protect their future.

## **Highlights**

### ¡Reclamo! empowers wage earners to recover income lost to wage theft

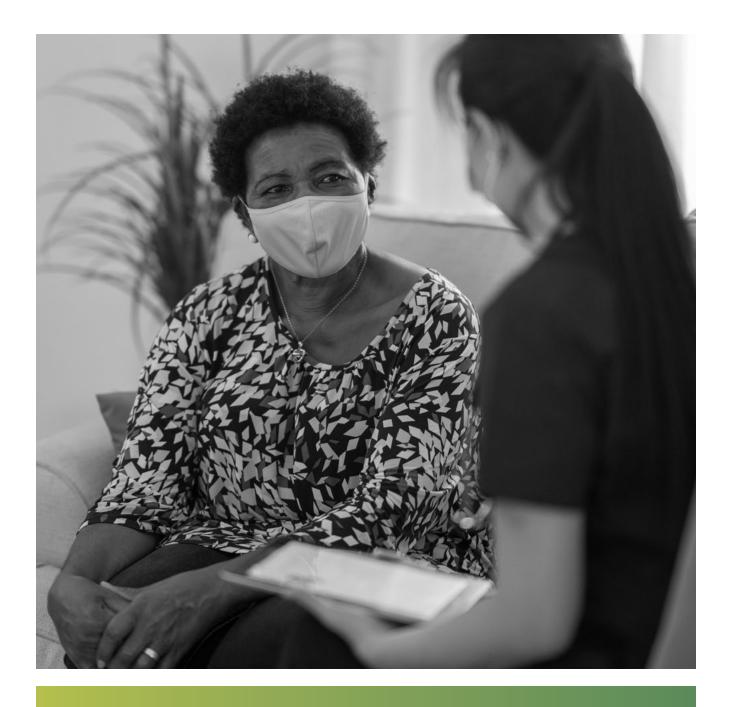
In 2020, in partnership with Make the Road New York, IAN co-designed and prototyped ¡Reclamo!, a Spanish-language digital legal tool to help make it easier for organizers and workers to identify if they've been victims of wage theft and file simple wage theft claims. ¡Reclamo! will begin its full rolling out in Q1 2021, and will enable the most vulnerable workers, including immigrant and low-wage workers, to confidently and safely enforce their rights and recover their stolen wages from any smartphone or computer – without an expensive attorney or mastery over the wage claim process. ¡Reclamo! will also build worker power by allowing workers to identify opportunities for organizing with their coworkers. As in the prototype phase, ¡Reclamo! is being developed in collaboration with immigrant workers and workers' advocates and draws on their leadership to identify additional avenues for empowerment.





## Pro Bono Manager

Pro Bono Manager, a social enterprise venture launched in 2007 with support from the Gates Foundation, offers law firms a customized practice management application to increase the effectiveness and reach of their pro bono programs. The application helps firms monitor matters and identify risks, provides analytics and data to improve efficiency and inform decision making, and supports engagement with easy-to-use practice resources, opportunity matching, and personal pro bono interest profiles. Pro Bono Manager has been adopted by 10 leading international law firms and is used by thousands of lawyers and paraprofessionals within those firms.



### **Risk Detector**

In 2020, Pro Bono Net significantly expanded our Risk Detector, a web-based screening and referral app which helps legal aid programs and their community partners collaborate to better identify, respond to, and remedy legal issues among low-income and isolated seniors. We worked with leading elder organizations in New York to expand use of the tool in Western New York and New York City, and launched pilots in Northern California, Maine, Alaska and Florida. A recent evaluation of the Risk Detector's use in one region showed that this innovative outreach model helps to identify cases from a variety of vulnerable and marginalized groups, including veterans, clients who live in rural areas, disabled people, and those who live alone, many of whom would not otherwise be identified as victims of issues such as elder abuse and would not engage in legal action.

## Risk Detector Case Study

Through Pro Bono Net's collaborative initiatives, many individuals are finally getting the help they need.

Carol had been a victim of domestic violence for over 40 years and in the wake of the #MeToo movement, she found the courage to file for divorce. Her husband ramped up his attacks in retaliation in the following months and Carol recognized she needed to protect herself further. Luckily, she was screened and referred to Legal Services of Northern California (LSNC) through the Risk Detector. LSNC advocates assisted Carol in obtaining a restraining order to get her the protection she needs.

Over the last two years we have been expanding our Legal Risk Detector tool which allows nurses, social workers and allied professionals to screen seniors and homebound clients for potential legal risks related to housing, consumer debt and financial exploitation. The tool proactively identifies issues that often go undetected or unreported among older adults, and facilitate referrals to legal services.

Carol was helped by our partners through the expansion in Northern California. Our Risk Detector has armed organizations like LSNC with an effective tool in their community lawyering arsenal. This opportunity for increased collaboration afforded by the Risk Detector facilitates referrals from community partners to legal aid organizations in New York, Northern California, Maine and Alaska.

"[Carol] told me that for the first time in 40 years, she has been able to sleep without nightmares or waking up in a cold sweat terrified she was going to be beaten or, worse, not wake up."

Shah'ada Shaban, Rural Senior Project Coordinator, Legal Services of Northern California



## Remote Legal Connect Platform

Pro Bono Net's Remote Legal Connect platform removes physical barriers to accessing justice by allowing legal services providers, pro bono initiatives, courts, and community partners to rapidly build and manage a remote legal support program to increase access to legal assistance for communities in need, regardless of location.

The need for this service was already extreme for rural communities, people with disabilities, the elderly, and other vulnerable and marginalized populations. The COVID-19 reality has significantly changed the way legal services and support are delivered, and the concurrent public health and economic crises have resulted in a surge in legal needs – and Pro Bono Net's Remote Legal Connect platform is helping to meet those needs.

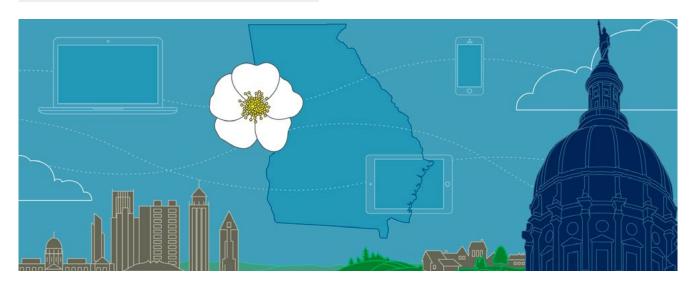
## **Highlights**

### Pro Bono Net Partners with Atlanta Legal Aid Society to serve Georgians in need

In November 2020, Pro Bono Net, in partnership with the Atlanta Legal Aid Society (ALAS) launched Georgia Legal Connect, an online platform that enables ALAS to enroll, manage, and connect staff and pro bono attorneys with remotely located clients for advice, counsel, and form preparation. ALAS offers free civil legal aid for low-income people across metro Atlanta. Georgia Legal Connect is an innovative remote legal support project created amid COVID-19 to quickly address low-income clients' legal needs.

"COVID-19 has really escalated the digital divide in Georgia. Lowincome Georgians can no longer receive in-person legal services at our offices or at our court-based clinics. We needed a way to reach our clients using technology that is accessible and easy to use. We were able to launch Georgia Legal Connect quickly after the pandemic hit, and it has helped us maintain our high level of services for clients and clinic attendees."

Kristin N. Verrill, Director of Grants & Innovation, Atlanta Legal Aid



### HIGHLIGHTS OF PRO BONO NET'S WORK IN 2020 ACROSS OUR NATIONAL PROGRAMS

 ${\bf Law Help\ Interactive\ served\ more\ than\ 1\ MILLION\ interviews}$ 

Our New York LiveHelp program helped more than 15,000 people connect to legal rights information, legal aid agencies and court resources

We trained more than 5,000 legal and social services advocates on effective uses of technology to respond to pressing needs

Our Remote Legal Support guide was downloaded more than 3,500 times

More than **4,300 NATURALIZATION** applications were generated through Citizenshipworks, saving applicants an estimated 4M dollars in fees





## **Legal Empowerment Initiative**

With support from the Open Society Foundations, Pro Bono Net launched a new initiative to advance the strategy and practice of technology-enabled legal empowerment strategies in the US, in partnership with justice communities where these models are already taking root. Over the past two years, PBN worked with three civil justice partners, Make the Road New York, Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico, and Alaska Legal Services Corporation, to co-design, test and evaluate pilot projects that have the potential to be scaled and that can serve as exemplars for future efforts. As a cohort, these communities participated in a Technology for Legal Empowerment Learning Network to build new knowledge and capacity in the US to leverage technology in legal empowerment models that complement, or reach beyond, traditional justice actors and institutions.

## Decolonizing Justice: Advancing Community-Grown Justice Solutions

In November 2020, Pro Bono Net, along with co-hosts Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico, Alaska Legal Services, the Open Society Justice initiative, and 30 other legal empowerment and community-based justice organizations, collaborated in this virtual convening, a week-long series of presentations, panels, and workshops. The series had more than 450 attendees, including leaders from across the access-to-justice landscape.

Participants in Decolonizing Justice discussed and addressed ways to democratize access to the law and build legal knowledge and power in local communities at a time of transformative change. Topics ranged from regulatory reform to allow paralegals to do more, to movement lawyering, to ways lawyers, caseworkers, and affected communities can work together to design digital tools to increase access to justice.

In one highlight of the convening, Alaska Legal Services' Eric Vang and Pro Bono Net's Katie Lam led a workshop on "co-design", also known as participatory design. As part of PBN's Legal Empowerment and Technology initiative, Katie and Eric had collaborated with advocates in Alaska to envision and apply technological solutions to Alaska's Social Security Disability Application casework system – centering the case worker, not the lawyer, in getting help for disabled Alaskans.

The convening came at a time of immense legal need. As Covid-19 related federal unemployment benefits, limited federal foreclosure protections, and the CDC's eviction moratorium were set to expire before the end of 2020, the material suffering and legal needs of low-income communities were increasing. As the pandemic took American lives – including a disproportionate number of people of color – and continued to inflict economic pain, it was a critical moment to center the lived experiences and historic inequities facing impacted communities in efforts to achieve a more just, equitable and responsive legal system moving forward.

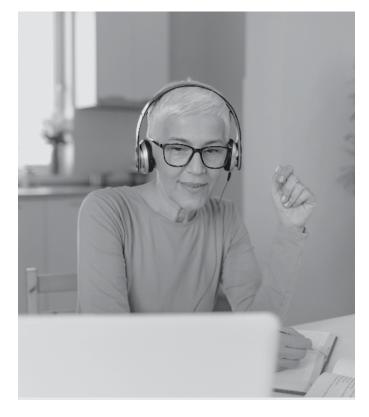
"What do we lose when we fail to include those most impacted? We lose justice itself."

La Quen Náay Liz Medicine Crow

"This conference was magnificent, groundbreaking work!"

"It was a totally new perspective that opened my eyes."

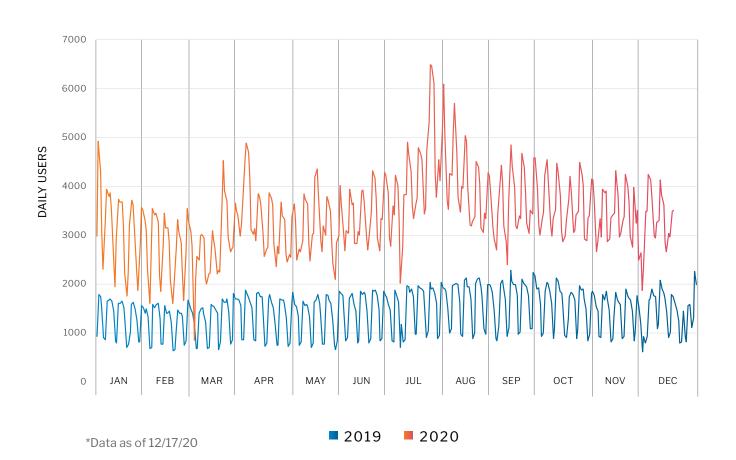
Conference feedback



## LawHelpNY AyudaLegalNY and LiveHelp

LawHelpNY, along with its Spanish mirror site AyudaLegalNY, is New York's only comprehensive source of legal referral information and a central access point for those looking for information to resolve their legal problems and for the pro bono attorneys who assist them. In response to increased need due to Covid-19, LawHelpNY added 50 new volunteer operators to staff the LiveHelp chat feature of the platform. Not only did LiveHelp experience a spike in usage starting in March, sometimes up 75% over the same period last year, as the pandemic peaked in New York City, operators also reported that cases became increasingly complex and chat times increased as people across the city and state struggled to navigate the parameters of urgent matters such as access to government benefits, rules related to housing and eviction, and evolving family law needs.

## LAW HELP NEW YORK USERS INCREASE AMID COVID-19





## Online Resources for Tenant Assistance

Pro Bono Net is partnering with the New York State Attorney General and a network of volunteer attorney programs across the State of New York to ensure that lowincome renters in regions outside of New York City can access legal assistance to maintain their housing during Covid-19. Pro Bono Net is designing an online resource center aimed at providing upto-date information and resources to give volunteer attorneys, tenants, and the general public clear, easily accessible guidance on the forms of assistance available to those facing eviction, as well as tools to present defenses in court. Working together with our partners across the state, Pro Bono Net and New York Programs are ensuring that individuals and families in all corners of the state can stay in their homes during this time of extreme public health and economic need.

## **Crime Victims Legal Network**

Pro Bono Net's partnership with Empire Justice Center through the Crime Victims Legal Network (CVLN) aims to connect victims of crime with agencies and service providers to help resolve civil legal issues and provide access to know-your-rights information. In 2020, PBN focused developing prototypes for the Victim Compensation Claim Application Guide and the Family Offense Petition Program, which will enable and empower users to seek justice even without a lawyer, as well as producing a desktop and mobile version of the Victim Compensation Guide. To improve user experience, PBN completed enhancements to the public-facing CVLN site and the Advocate Gateway, which serves as a membership portal for attorneys. Further, PBN added a language translation tool on the website which allows visitors to view pages in Chinese Korean, Russian, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Bengali, Italian, German, and Arabic.

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 $bringing\ the\ power\ of\ the\ law\ to\ all$ 













