



Georgia Association of Paralegals, Inc.

Charter Member, National Federation of Paralegal Associations, Inc.

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Leading Georgia's Paralegals Since 1973

In 1973, a group of Atlanta area paralegals joined together to form the Atlanta Association of Legal Assistants, Inc. Their objective was to provide support for persons entering this new field, and to promote the profession to the legal community. They also wanted to create a forum for contributing to the discussions and decisions of both state and local bar associations regarding training and utilization of paralegals by attorneys.

"Paralegalism" soon extended across the state, and it became apparent that people outside Atlanta needed a voice as well. membership was expanded to include all legal assistants in Georgia. In January, 1976, AALA became GALA - Georgia Association of Legal Assistants, Inc. In 1997, GALA became GAP - Georgia Association of Paralegals, Inc.

GAP's purposes remain the same as when first formulated over 25 years ago: 1) to enhance the role of paralegals in the legal profession; 2) to improve the working conditions of paralegals; and 3) to maintain a continuing relationship with bar associations throughout the state.

Professional Development

GAP offers members opportunities for developing personal skills by working with committees in areas relevant for professional growth.

Opportunities exist for working with committees in many areas such as: *Pro Bono* Projects, State Paralegal Affairs, Speakers Bureau, Newsletter, Membership and Public Relations.

Pro Bono Committee

April 17-18 - NFPA *Pro Bono* Conference Atlanta GA at the Hilton Atlanta Hotel

The NFPA *Pro Bono* Conference will be held in conjunction with the ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference and will be hosted by the Georgia Association of Paralegals. The EJC ends at Noon on April 17th and the NFPA *Pro Bono* Conference will begin at 1:00 p.m. and conclude on April 18th. The NFPA *Pro Bono* Conference is FREE to attend and will also be held at the Hilton Atlanta Hotel. For more information please contact the GAP *Pro Bono* Chair, Mizette Coakley, mizettec@hotmail.com.

Current Projects

Cobb County Volunteer Probation Officer Program

Paralegals who successfully pass a background check make a one-year commitment to function as probation officers for the Cobb County, Georgia Court System. Contact Gary Struelz, Director at 770-528-7986

Dekalb County Court Watch Program

Paralegals observe arraignments of domestic violence cases and make a report to the Solicitor General's office. Contact Brooke Hussey dekalbcourtwatch@hotmail.com

Georgia Legal Services Program

Contact the Private Bar Coordinator at 404-894-7707

Past Projects

Fulton County Child Support Abandonment Calendar

This was a great opportunity that made a visible difference. GAP was the first group of paralegals to participate in this project. To read more about his project please go to our publications page and look at the April edition of the *Paragraph*.

GAP strongly supports the *pro bono* precepts espoused by the National Federation of Paralegals and encourages all paralegals to aspire to NFPA's goal of twenty-four hours of *pro bono* service annually per paralegal. GAP's *pro bono* activities are coordinated by its *Pro Bono* Committee.

Georgia Association Helps Others in Multiple Counties

A founding association of NFPA was recognized at the 2002 Fall Convention when the Georgia Association of Paralegals (Georgia) was named winner of the 2002 Association *Pro Bono* award. The award is sponsored annually by The Affiliates to honor the joint efforts of a single NFPA member association in *pro bono*.

The association's efforts in *pro bono* have been many and varied. Georgia joined with the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation to draft wills and related estate planning documents for indigent residents of Fulton County, the largest county in the state. As a result of 9-11, this service was extended to emergency service personnel in Fulton County, starting with firefighters and moving on to marshals and police officers. The latter group was determined to be in immediate need of estate planning services due to the sensitive agencies located in the Atlanta area that could be a target for terrorists, such as the Centers for Disease Control, the headquarters of Cable News Network, and one of the nation's largest civilian air terminals, Hartsfield International.

To assist victims of abuse, Georgia worked with AVLF to obtain initial temporary protective orders (TPOs). Only paralegals who have completed AVLF's training session on domestic violence and TPO procedures may participate. These paralegals walk the abuse victims through procedures at the Fulton County courthouse until the point where an AVLF attorney takes over to represent the clients in court.

The association has also worked in Cobb County in the volunteer probation officer program, meeting weekly with adjudicated persons who are the clients in the program. The program targets individuals deemed suitable for probation rather than incarceration.



Left to right: Sharon Jurec, The Affiliates Representative, Jennifer Kirkland, President, Georgia Association of Paralegals, and Marian Crapanzano, former NFPA Pro Bono Co-Coordinator

The Georgia Association of Paralegals was the winner of the 2002 Association Pro Bono Award

Previous Winners of Association Pro Bono Award:

National Capital (2001)
Massachusetts (2000)
Pittsburgh (1999)

Georgia Legal Services has received volunteer time from Georgia paralegals for several years. An additional service in 2002 was a quick-response team for dying clients who need a will or a power of attorney. Georgia *pro bono* co-chair, Lex Wells, maintains a database of experienced paralegals who will respond to these difficult situations.

In DeKalb County, paralegals participate in Court Watch, in which observers monitor domestic violence cases on the misdemeanor arraignment calendars. The program has three objectives: to monitor actions of the prosecutor, judge, and defendant; to provide a watching presence in the courtroom; and to collate and submit data on domestic violence for the next session of the state legislature.

At the time of the award, Georgia's *pro bono* committee had just completed a successful seminar on animal law. It publishes a newsletter to keep the association's members informed on *pro bono* and encourage them to join the committee and volunteer for *pro bono* projects.

NFPA and The Affiliates congratulate the Georgia Association of Paralegals on developing, promoting, and maintaining an outstanding *pro bono* program to benefit many segments of the state's community.

Paralegals and *Pro Bono*

By Jennifer K. Kirkland

Pro Bono is providing quality legal services to those in the population who cannot afford an attorney or who do not have equal access to justice. Paralegals, just as attorneys, should be bound by certain ethical considerations. As a professional paralegal, one should be sensitive to the legal needs of the public and promote the development and implementation of programs that address those needs.

How does one go about assessing unmet legal needs? The American Bar Association did a Comprehensive Legal Needs Study, which showed that there were unmet legal needs in housing, health, employment, community/regional problems and finance/consumer problems. It is estimated that 70-90 % of low-income households receive no legal assistance. To determine need, one must look at the level of need that exists in a certain service area, match the paralegals' level of expertise in such areas, examine whether or not there exist other specialized resources to meet the needs, find resources for training, have the willingness of volunteers, and quality assurance. Many times a task force will be created or a study will be conducted. Based on the results of the study, recommendations will be made. Many programs use intake screening to determine whether or not an individual qualifies for assistance on a *pro bono* basis.

If you are a paralegal interested in *pro bono*, how do you get started? You could form a committee or join one already in existence. The Georgia Association of Paralegals has a *pro bono* committee that meets once a month. You could contact your local paralegal association, as well as state and local bar. You could also contact a *pro bono* organization directly and inquire as to whether or not they utilize paralegals in their program.

The commitment of time you would need to devote to a *pro bono* program varies from program to program. The same holds true for training. It depends on the program's structure, the legal needs of the client, and priorities of the program. In addition, sometimes there may be limitations or requirements imposed by statutes, regulations, contracts or ethical obligations. Some training includes continuing education credit, which is an added benefit for the paralegal. The paralegal needs to be prepared to expect many different challenges from a client when engaging in a *pro bono* project. Sometimes the client may feel intimidated or afraid. Some projects involve working with the elderly, disabled, mentally ill, or the client may need bilingual assistance.

Getting involved with *pro bono* programs expands the role of the paralegal. Thousands of paralegals are involved in diverse *pro bono* programs around the country. Many paralegal associations participate in *pro bono* programs in conjunction with local bar associations and *pro bono* agencies. You may find yourself teaching pro se litigants, working with community groups, working with and being a witness for an abused or neglected child, interviewing inmates, working on a class action suit, assisting in the writing of publications or legal manuals, helping abused women with the legal process, or any number of endeavors.

There are federal and state agencies that allow for non-lawyer representation. For example, the Board of Immigration Appeals, Immigration and Naturalization Service is a federal agency that allows for non-lawyer representation. Michigan's Unemployment Agency also permits non-lawyer representation regarding unemployment compensation issues. However, one must always guard against the unauthorized practice of law. It is important that if you are involved in an agency whose duties allow for non-lawyer representation that you stress you are not an attorney. There are only a few exceptions when you are not under the supervision and direction of an attorney. You must recall that you are operating within an attorney-client relationship. You must always maintain client confidences. You must retain responsibility for any legal work and make sure you are covered under malpractice insurance.

Now that you are ready to begin, what are the advantages of getting involved in *pro bono* work? Doing *pro bono* work allows you to network and make contacts with the legal community that will be invaluable later. You are able to learn on the job, and there is no better teacher than experience. Most *pro bono* work involves working with clients, which allows you to develop interpersonal communication skills. Often times, at the end of a *pro bono* project or clinic, award and recognition is given. One paralegal receiving recognition may attract others. The paralegal's law firm or company may become more supportive and it is always positive publicity. The National Federation of Paralegal Associations offers a lapel pin in recognition of 24 hours or more of *pro bono* work per year. The Georgia Association of Paralegals presents a *pro bono* award annually. It is important to always track your hours. You should list *pro bono* work on your resume, especially if you are a student. It is an excellent resume-building tool. Last but not least, the biggest advantage of doing *pro bono* work is that it is fun, challenging, and will provide you with a tremendous sense of satisfaction. Nothing feels better than helping those in need and getting a smile and a "thank-you."

Now that you are ready to begin, where do you go?

Here are just a few places to get you started:

- Georgia Association of Paralegals, 404-522-1457
- Georgia Legal Services Program, 404-894-7707
- DeKalb County Courtwatch Program, 404-471-5980
- *Pro Bono* Project of the State Bar of Georgia, 404-527-8762
- Women's Resource Center, 404-508-9717
- The Partnership Against Domestic Violence, 404-870-9600
- AARP, 1-800-633-4496
- Kids In Need of Dreams (T.I.P.), 404-584-9500

***Pro Bono* Web Sites:**

<http://www.abanet.org/litigation/committee/probono/home.html>

<http://www.abanet.org/homeless/home.html>

<http://www.abanet.org/legalassts>

<http://www.abanet.org/homeless/home.html>

<http://www.essential.org/goodworks>

<http://www.paralegals.org>

<http://www.equaljustice.org>

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