



P R O B O N O P R O G R A M

D.C. BAR PRO BONO PROGRAM
LANDLORD TENANT RESOURCE CENTER
Project Description

Introduction. Each year, landlords file over 40,000 cases in the Landlord Tenant Branch of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia (the "L/T Court") seeking summary evictions of tenants. Most cases allege non-payment or some other lease violation. Over 98% of tenants and nearly 14% of landlords proceed pro se through L/T Court. Regardless of the facts and merits of their cases, unrepresented tenants face a high risk of having judgments entered against them, while inexperienced pro se landlords risk having their cases dismissed, often because of procedural missteps.

The Project. Working closely with members of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, and under the auspices of the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program, the Landlord Tenant Resource Center was launched on January 13, 2004 to improve due process and access to justice in L/T Court.

Services. The Resource Center is a piece of the continuum of services that litigants now may receive in Landlord and Tenant Court. The Center (i) informs pro se litigants on how to obtain continuances and retain counsel; (ii) makes referrals to legal service providers in appropriate cases; (iii) informs pro se litigants on how to present their cases in court; (iv) assists litigants with preparing pro se pleadings; (v) helps pro se litigants understand L/T Court proceedings; and (vi) informs low-income litigants regarding the financial and other social-service resources that might be available to them and refer such litigants to the appropriate resources. Self-help material supplements the services provided by Resource Center volunteers, including pro se pleadings and written materials including those available on Lawhelp.org/dc.

Resource Center volunteers also work closely with the Court-Based Legal Services Project to refer litigants to legal services attorneys who need representation on the same day.

Operations. The Resource Center is located in Room 115, just outside the Landlord and Tenant Courtroom in Building B of the D.C. Superior Court. The Center is open for business from 9:15 AM to 12:00 PM. Volunteers arrive by 9:00AM and stay until all customers are served (usually by about 1:30PM).

Staffing. The Resource Center is staffed everyday the Court is in session. Law firms are responsible for recruiting three (3) lawyers and one (1) legal assistant for each session on a rotating basis. To be eligible to participate, Resource Center lawyers must be admitted to the D.C. Bar or have an application pending. Each firm is responsible for coordinating and scheduling its volunteers, and for ensuring coverage in the event one of the scheduled volunteers is unable to attend. Law firms commit to staffing the Center at one of three levels of frequency: one day each week; one day every two weeks; or one day every four weeks.

Support. Each Resource Center attorney has the opportunity to undergo training in D.C. landlord tenant law and procedures through the regularly scheduled D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program training (which also is recorded on DVD), the D.C. Law Students In Court orientation, individually-scheduled training sessions, or a combination thereof. However, most training is conducted on-site by Pro Bono Program staff who are present to support the volunteers at each session. Training manuals and other reference material also are available to Resource Center attorneys.

Contact. For more information or to volunteer, please contact Dan Clark, Managing Attorney, at 202.737.400, ext. 3354 or at dclark@dcbbar.org.