A Focus On Racial Justice: 2021 Public Counsel Remote Volunteer Opportunities

Following are pro bono opportunities that address the impacts of systemic racism and can be done all or in large part remotely. The primary contact at Public Counsel for these matters is Pro Bono Director David Daniels, ddaniels@publiccounsel.org, and you can also reach out to the project lawyers identified below.

**Limited Scope – Discrete Matters (5 – 40 Hours)**

1. **ASSIST A NONPROFIT OR SMALL BUSINESS THAT HELPS LOW INCOME COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**
   For California-licensed attorneys with at least three years of transactional, advisory or commercial litigation experience. Businesses in high-contact sectors, such as accommodation, food services, and retail, are both most affected by COVID-19 and most likely to be minority owned. Due to the lack of generational wealth created by centuries of institutionalized racism, black- and brown-owned businesses often lack the safety nets required to absorb the dire economic impacts caused by this health crisis. The Community Development Project provides comprehensive transactional services to nonprofit organizations and small businesses that strengthen communities struggling with poverty and racism. The work ranges from assisting newly-conceived nonprofits with incorporation and tax exemptions, to providing advice to established nonprofits and small start-up businesses in specific subject areas, including contracts, labor/employment, intellectual property, fundraising law, affordable housing, real estate, land use/licensing, and tax compliance. Many nonprofits and small business have legal concerns precipitated by the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly in the areas of labor/employment and real estate/commercial lease workouts. This advisory work can be handled remotely. Contact: Carlo Castro at ccastro@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** 5 to 25 hours.

2. **PROVIDE BUSINESS LAW ADVICE TO SMALL DAY CARE PROVIDERS SERVING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**
   For all attorneys. Small day care providers are being especially hard hit with questions relative to the COVID-19 outbreak (for example, questions of business liability due to virus transmission, lease obligations, and labor/employment concerns). These businesses provide critical supportive childcare services to frontline workers in communities of color, which are suffering because of generations of economic marginalization and institutionalized racism. Business lawyers will help answers these limited-scope legal questions, and Public Counsel experts will provide volunteers with needed technical expertise. Interactions with clients can be conducted remotely. Contact: Carlo Castro at ccastro@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** On average, 3 to 5 hours over 2 to 3 weeks; deadlines vary.
3. **ASSIST AN IMMIGRANT WHO IS A SURVIVOR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR OTHER CRIME OBTAIN LAWFUL STATUS IN THE U.S. THROUGH A VAWA, U VISA OR ADJUSTMENT OF STATUS APPLICATION**

   a. **VAWA and UVisa Representation:** For all attorneys. Assist immigrant men, women and children who are survivors of domestic violence and other serious crimes apply for and obtain lawful status and access to social services through VAWA and U Visa applications. You will undertake written advocacy and develop strong relationships with your client, the overwhelming majority of whom are persons of color whose victimization is a direct consequence of the institutionalized racism that exists both in their communities of origin and in this country. Most work can be performed remotely, including filings by mail. Contact: Gina Amato at gamato@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** About 40 hours over three to four months.

   b. **Adjustment of Status:** For all attorneys. Assist a U Visa holder obtain lawful permanent residency, or a “green card.” This enables her to travel outside of the U.S., provides additional protection from deportation, and allows her to apply for U.S. citizenship when eligible. With fear of deportation rampant in the immigrant community, this is an opportunity to help immigrant crime victims with temporary status seek more permanency in an effort to avoid the threat of separation from their loved ones. This work can be done remotely, and filings can be handled by mail. Contact: Gina Amato at gamato@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** About 30 hours. Petitions are adjudicated within about 10 months, and no hearings are required.

4. **REPRESENT A VETERAN IN IMPROVING THEIR MILITARY DISCHARGE STATUS AND ABILITY TO ACCESS THE BENEFITS THEY DESERVE**

   For any licensed attorney. Service members experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury often do not receive the treatment they need. As a result, their symptoms persist and are misconstrued by the military as misconduct that warrants a less than honorable discharge. These veterans are left with little or no mental health or other support. During World War II less than 15% of military veterans were people of color. Today that figure is 35%, and most have suffered under racist systems that the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed. This is an opportunity to advocate for a veteran’s discharge status to be upgraded, which opens the door to VA healthcare and benefits, removes stigma associated with the initial discharge, and increases employment opportunities. The work includes drafting client affidavits, developing supportive evidence, requesting and reviewing military and medical records, and writing an advocacy brief. The majority of this work can be done remotely, and hearings do not require a physical appearance. Contact: CVA Administrative Assistant at eva@publiccounsel.org; **Time Commitment:** 25 - 40 hours.

5. **HELP A TERMINALLY ILL PARENT ENSURE STABILITY FOR THEIR CHILD**

   For California-licensed attorneys. Work with a family to ensure a stable custody plan by representing a caregiver, often a grandparent, in petitioning for legal custody of a child where the child’s custodial parent is terminally ill and can no longer care for them. You will meet the client, prepare and file a packet of judicial council forms and a declaration that form the basis of the application for guardianship, and represent the client at a remote guardianship hearing. With client
consent, the entire matter can be handled remotely from your office or home desk, without having to travel to make court appearances. Contact: Beth Tsoulos at btsoulos@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** About 25 hours

6. **HELP A CHILD OBTAIN A PERMANENT GUARDIAN**
   For California-licensed attorneys. Represent a caregiver, often a grandparent, in petitioning for legal custody of a child where the child’s parents are unable to care for them. You will meet the client, prepare and file a packet of judicial council forms and a declaration that form the basis of the application for guardianship, and represent the client at a remote guardianship hearing. The entire matter can be handled remotely from your office or home desk, without having to travel to make court appearances. Contact: Beth Tsoulos at btsoulos@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** About 25 hours

**More In-Depth Matters**

7. **HOUSING LITIGATION THAT PROTECTS VULNERABLE TENANTS DURING THE HEALTH CRISIS AND BEYOND**
   For attorneys with civil litigation experience. Black and Latinx tenants are more than twice as likely as whites to be experiencing rent-related hardships. As the economic impacts of the pandemic place ever greater pressures upon the most vulnerable tenants of color, some landlords have sought to circumvent the COVID-19 tenant protection laws in Los Angeles and exploit tenants’ vulnerabilities by resorting to cruel self-help eviction tactics, e.g., cutting off essential utilities, changing locks, destroying personal property, threatening to contact ICE, and using the police to force tenants and their children to the streets. The Homeless Prevention Law Project needs firms and litigators willing to give their time and resources to litigate these cases, stop this illegal activity, and vindicate their clients. Tenants who are unrepresented simply cannot bear the force of these aggressive and illegal schemes, and need lawyers to file lawsuits to protect their interests and address their injuries. Enforcing tenant protection rules will provide remedies that are largely unused due to too few attorneys taking on these matters, which are hugely impactful for clients who, for example, seek to replace their belongings and recover damages for service interruptions. It’s important to pursue this litigation to demonstrate to landlords that their tactics will not go unchecked. Interactions with clients can take place remotely, but court appearances may be required. Contact: Lorraine Lopez, at llopez@publiccounsel.org, or Silvana Naguib at snaguib@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** On average 3 to 5 hours/week over several months; deadlines vary and may be impacted by court access limitations due to COVID-19.

8. **CONSUMER FRAUD AND CONSUMER PROTECTION**
   For California-licensed attorneys with at least three years of experience; or, you can be supervised by a more senior attorney at your firm or company. Assist a vulnerable client who has been defrauded out of her home, personal property or life savings, or who is facing immediate financial pressures due to COVID-19. Many cases involve bad-acting family members or unethical professionals operating independently from a prominent financial institution. Consequently, often there is not a conflict of interest problem. Most cases are filed in L.A. Superior Court and offer a rich opportunity to gain litigation experience, including client and witness interviews, strategizing and shaping the case plan, drafting and filing the complaint, propounding and responding to discovery, preparing and arguing dispositive motions, and taking the matter to trial. In anticipation
of a tsunami of rental and other COVID-19-related debt collections cases later this year, we hope to recruit and train a cohort of pro bono attorneys who will be available to take on discrete debt collection matters for settlement or litigation, depending on the facts. Let us know if you are interested in being part of this group. Contact: Joanna Adler at jadler@publiccounsel.org. Time Commitment: Varies.

9. REVIEW AN APPELLATE RECORD, PREPARE AN APPELLATE BRIEF, OR ARGUE A CASE BEFORE AN APPELLATE COURT
For California-licensed attorneys with at least three years of litigation experience that includes involvement in appellate brief writing. Through its Remote Appellate Self-Help Clinic, Public Counsel helps pro se litigants by evaluating their appeals to determine whether they are appropriate for placement with pro bono counsel, and, if so, locating counsel to handle the appeal. Litigators and appellate specialists are needed to review appellate records and provide detailed memoranda on the merits of the cases to our Clinic’s Supervisor. In certain cases, the pro bono attorney may be asked to further engage in the appellate brief writing and oral argument – but that additional work is optional. The majority of this work can be handled remotely over the phone, via e-mail, and via access to court records through the internet. Public Counsel’s experts can provide you with advice and support. Contact: David Daniels at ddaniels@publiccounsel.org. Time Commitment: Varies.

10. HELP A CHILD IN FOSTER CARE BE ADOPTED INTO A PERMANENT HOME
Opportunity for a “team” of lawyers dedicated to handling adoptions from L.A. County’s foster care system. You will assist parents seeking to adopt and foster care youth who have been abused or neglected realize their dream of a permanent home for these children. The majority of these children are persons of color whose lives and circumstances have been impacted by institutional racism. Public Counsel provides comprehensive trainings and ongoing technical support throughout this process. In addition to finalizing adoptions, there is a big need for attorneys to advocate for children with special needs to obtain necessary services and the appropriate level of funding, including retroactive benefits. Much of this work, including the adoptions hearings, can be conducted remotely. Contact: Karen Ullman at kullman@publiccounsel.org. Time Commitment: About 20 to 30 hours per case over a 3 to 5 month period, depending on the number of children and the service/benefits advocacy. Complex benefits cases require more time.

11. HELP A VETERAN SECURE DISABILITY BENEFITS FOR SERVICE-RELATED INJURIES
For any licensed attorney who is either accredited, or is willing to become accredited, by the VA. Many military veterans come home with injuries – physical and mental – as a result of their active duties. Public Counsel’s Center for Veterans’ Advancement (CVA) helps homeless and low-income veterans navigate the VA’s complex benefits system by representing them in their applications and appeals for service-connected disability compensation. Cases involve drafting client affidavits, developing evidence of in-service injuries, requesting and reviewing military and medical records, and writing an advocacy brief. This is a great opportunity to work one-on-one with a veteran to obtain the benefits they have earned. Contact: CVA Administrative Assistant at cva@publiccounsel.org. Time Commitment: 40-50 hours.
12. IMPACT LITIGATION: PARTNER WITH PUBLIC COUNSEL’S OPPORTUNITY UNDER LAW PROJECT TO CREATE A FORCE IN THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

Public Counsel’s Opportunity Under Law program is led by nationally-recognized civil rights lawyer Mark Rosenbaum and its mission is to address causes of economic injustice in communities that are losing ground in the fight for opportunity. “We do not accept as a given that there must be underachieving schools and out of reach higher education, dead end jobs, homelessness or childhood trauma associated with poverty and the failure of our democratic institutions to strengthen families and afford meaningful opportunity,” proclaims Rosenbaum. “We do not define these conditions as legal problems, legislative conundrums or organizing goals. Rather, they are all of the above and more, calling for comprehensive, innovative strategies to reinvent and reinvigorate those institutions that are the foundation of our democracy. Economic injustice in all its forms is the civil rights issue of the 21st century.”

The creation of Opportunity Under Law dramatically expanded Public Counsel’s impact litigation program, which also develops alliances with organizations specializing in economic research and policy analysis, communications, as well as political and social action campaigns. Consistent with Public Counsel’s long history of pro bono collaboration, Opportunity Under Law works closely with many law firms and gifted lawyers committed to volunteering their time in support of the program’s mission. Whether you are interested in dedicating a team of litigation attorneys within your firm to partner with Opportunity Under Law in the fight for equality, or you would like to donate much needed communication, data analysis or other supportive services to further the cause, Public Counsel wants to work with you. Contact: David Daniels at ddaniels@publiccounsel.org. **Time Commitment:** Varies.

13. COVID 19 BANKRUPTCY RESPONSE: NEED FOR ATTORNEYS SEEKING TRIAL OR CONSUMER LAW EXPERIENCE

COVID-19 has cause an array of devastating financial impacts, including job loss and catastrophic economic consequences that have increased the need for bankruptcy assistance.

- Are you a litigator and/or attorneys seeking trial experience? We need your help with representing clients seeking to discharge their student loans in a bankruptcy court action. **No bankruptcy experience is necessary.**

- Are you an experienced consumer bankruptcy attorney? We need your help with representing clients in chapter 7 bankruptcy cases and/or adversary proceedings.

- Are you an attorney interested in providing limited counsel and advice to clients on bankruptcy legal matters? We need your help assisting clients remotely with bankruptcy and bankruptcy related matters.

- Are you interested in honing your public speaking skills? We need attorneys willing to do bankruptcy power point presentation in English and Spanish for individuals attending a legal workshop.

Contact: Maggie Bordeaux at mbordeaux@publiccounsel.org **Time Commitment:** Varies.
14. **LOCATE VOLUNTEER SPECIALISTS**  
Many of our litigation disputes, including those involving the rights of vulnerable women and girls of color who have been objectified and “othered,” require experts to support the theories and analysis of the case. These experts include doctors, physicians, therapists, vocational experts, accountants (CPA’s), private investigators and actuarial analysts. We are also in great need of Web Design specialists. Contact: Sandra Madera at [smadera@publiccounsel.org](mailto:smadera@publiccounsel.org). **Time Commitment:** Varies.

15. **LANGUAGE TRANSLATORS**  
For all adults who are fluent in Spanish or other languages, including Russian, Arabic and French. The biggest need is Spanish. Most of Public Counsel’s projects need translation services for client interviews and document translation. This work can be done remotely. Contact: Our Volunteer Translator Database, [https://goo.gl/forms/Zv2JnPFlBoY9jmK42](https://goo.gl/forms/Zv2JnPFlBoY9jmK42). **Time Commitment:** Varies.