



March 4, 2024

Illinois State Bar Association
Committee on Delivery of Legal Services
414 S. Second St.
Springfield, IL 62701

Re: John C. McAndrews Pro Bono Service Award

Dear Committee,

Prairie State Legal Services is pleased to nominate Butler, Giraudo, and Meister for the 2024 John C. McAndrews Pro Bono Service Award. Butler, Giraudo, and Meister attorneys have been an impactful partner with Prairie State Legal Services' (PSLS) pro bono program through their acceptance of individual case referrals, as well as their central role in helping to create the 10th Judicial Circuit Pro Bono divorce clinic.

In 2023, the 10th Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee identified a need for more representation in divorce cases. There are many self-represented litigants who do not fully understand the process and would greatly benefit from representation. Judge Wilson, the chair of the 10th Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee, proposed setting aside a time on her court call for a clinic so that a group of clients could all be served at one time. Tamara (Tami) Meister, a member of the Pro Bono Committee and an attorney at Butler, Giraudo, and Meister, immediately volunteered to serve as the pro bono attorney for the first clinic in the spring of 2023.

For the first clinic, Tami represented six clients through resolution of their dissolution of marriage cases, each facing different challenges. For one client, Tami engaged in extensive negotiations with the opposing party, right up until entering the courtroom to call the case. In another case, Tami worked with both parties to develop a parenting agreement which would be in their children's best interests. In another case, the client's car broke down on the way to the courthouse. While the client arranged for their mother to pick them up and drive them to court, Tami represented the client before the judge, ensuring that everything was settled, and the client arrived just in time to sign the documents.

After the first clinic, Tami worked with PSLS staff and the Pro Bono Committee to improve the procedures for future clinics. Based on the success of the first clinic, another law firm volunteered to accept six cases for a second clinic, and Tami herself volunteered for the third clinic of the year. In that clinic, Tami agreed to represent three clients and recruited another pro bono attorney to represent the remaining three clients. We have additional clinics planned

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Kim Thielbar DIRECTOR OF PRO BONO SERVICES





for 2024, and Tami has volunteered to provide support and act as a resource for other pro bono attorneys who need additional help throughout the life of their clinic case.

Tami has represented nine clients over the first three divorce clinics, devoting almost 70 hours to the case work, with many more hours dedicated to Pro Bono Committee meetings, clinic development, and clinic evaluation. Tami was instrumental in the creation of a pro bono structure that has increased volunteer opportunities and is serving more clients who need representation. For example, the initial design of the clinic anticipated serving only clients with uncontested cases and no kids or property to divide. However, the client need did not always fit within those parameters. Tami willingly accepted referrals for cases with both children and property issues. With her help, we have been able to identify ways to serve a broader range of clients through the clinic model, extending the benefits of Tami's work beyond just the clients she served.

In addition to Tami's work on the divorce clinic, another attorney at the firm, Kelly Giraudo, regularly accepts direct referrals from PSLs. Kelly began volunteering with PSLs in 2018 and has taken on eight client cases in that time, including four cases within the last year. In one ongoing case, she has worked tirelessly to resolve the case for the client, despite the opposing party's refusal to cooperate in developing a parenting agreement that will serve their child's best interests. On top of accepting direct referrals for full representation, Kelly also serves clients as a pro bono attorney for the PSLs Family Law Project. As part of that project, she provides advice and brief assistance to self-represented litigants facing a variety of family law issues, so that they can better navigate the court process on their own.

Kelly also serves on the Peoria County Bar Association's Family Law Committee, where she enthusiastically promotes pro bono service to other family law practitioners. At her request, the committee invited PSLs' Pro Bono Coordinator to address the committee during their annual CLE presentation regarding pro bono opportunities. She also regularly works with PSLs to brainstorm ways to increase pro bono involvement and communicate the need for family law attorneys to engage in pro bono service.

The attorneys at the firm are not the only ones who volunteer their time and contribute to the firm's pro bono work. Kelly McCall, a paralegal, provides vital case management support which makes it possible for the firm to simultaneously represent multiple divorce clinic clients and accept individual case referrals. Clients referred to the firm have recognized the personal attention and care provided to their cases and have expressed gratitude for the representation they received. That personal care and attention would not be possible without the other firm staff treating each pro bono client as though their case was just as important as any paying client.

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Members of the firm are also deeply involved in the community, including serving on the 10th Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee, attending the annual Spring Pro Bono Social to encourage pro bono work, and attending the annual bar association golf outing, which helps to raise money for PSLS and other causes. These efforts help to expand pro bono and serve more clients than just the individual clients served directly by the firm.

We are proud to nominate Butler, Giraud, and Meister for this award in recognition of their pro bono work and their role in developing new ways to expand volunteer services to low-income clients. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please feel free to contact me at kthielbar@pslegal.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kimberly Thielbar".

Kimberly Thielbar
Director of Pro Bono Services

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EMAIL volunteer@pslegal.org
WEBSITE pslegal.org

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