

2019

PBO Menu of Opportunities

A GUIDE FOR LAWYERS

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Pro Bono Ontario (PBO) is the legal profession’s engine for access to justice, powering its response to unmet legal needs. PBO creates and manages innovative programs that deliver direct legal services to low-income Ontarians who have nowhere else to turn, while at the same time providing rewarding, risk-managed pro bono opportunities for lawyers.

With a focus on civil, non-family, legal problems (which represent 60% of unmet legal needs in Ontario), PBO programs present rich opportunities for lawyers regardless of their substantive focus and accommodate the busiest of schedules. Furthermore, all PBO projects come with extended LawPRO coverage and a range of supports for volunteers.

* These programs present opportunities for in-house counsel and solicitors as well as for litigators.

Summary Advice and Brief Services

PBO's short-term service programs are the essence of a light touch with heavy impact. They are designed to provide just-in-time legal assistance to help clients understand the nature of their legal problems, learn more about their rights and options, make informed decisions and take next steps. Internal and external program evaluations have found that 90% of clients report being able to follow the advice provided and 98% use or intend to use the legal documents drafted for them during the course of their consultations.

Free Legal Advice Hotline*

Summary: In 2017, PBO opened Canada's only telephone hotline to combine summary advice and legal drafting services for low-income clients facing a range of legal issues. The Free Legal Advice Hotline assists clients in the areas of civil procedure, employment, housing, consumer protection, consumer debt, powers of attorney and corporate law for charities, non-profits and small businesses. The Hotline is open Monday to Friday from 9:30 am to 4:00 pm. From PBO's Yonge and Eglinton office in Toronto, volunteers provide consultations of up to 30 minutes per call. In addition to summary legal advice, lawyers may review documents submitted by clients and help them draft legal documents like simple pleadings, demand letters, rescission letters, and settlement offers or counteroffers.

Volunteer Supports: The Hotline runs on a Salesforce platform that supports case management, document assembly tools and an extensive keyword-searchable knowledge management library. PBO provides all volunteers with training and onsite staff support.

Commitment: 4 full-day shifts per year (one per quarter). Ideal for litigators, solicitors and in-house-counsel.

PBO Need: HIGH

Court-Based Law Help Centres

Summary: In 2006, PBO launched North America's first pro bono court-based program providing low-income, self-represented litigants with free legal information, legal advice, court-form completion assistance and periodic representation in court. The centres primarily assist walk-in clients, but consultations through the Hotline are also provided. Volunteers help clients make informed decisions (e.g. whether to commence litigation or agree to settle) and to take next steps as self-represented litigants (e.g. assemble a motion record or prepare for a settlement conference). Services are provided in Toronto (393 University Avenue or 47 Sheppard Avenue East) and in Ottawa (161 Elgin Street).

Volunteer Supports: The Law Help Centres run on a Salesforce platform that supports case management, document assembly tools and an extensive keyword-searchable knowledge management library. Clients are subject to frontline intake and screening prior to referral for pro bono assistance and volunteers are provided with training and onsite staff support.

Commitment: 4 full-day shifts per year (one per quarter). Ideal for all litigators.

PBO Need: HIGH

Powers of Attorney Project*

Summary: PBO partners with various Toronto hospitals to provide Powers of Attorney for Property and Personal Care on an in-patient basis. The service is designed for seniors, those with terminal illnesses and people undergoing major procedures who need help organizing their affairs. The POA service is offered on an as-needed basis.

Volunteer Supports: PBO provides volunteers with free CPD, interview guides and checklists, and mentorship.

Commitment: 1-2 days per year. Ideal for in-house counsel, government lawyers and solicitors. This program offers opportunities for volunteer lawyers to partner with support staff (law clerks and paralegals).

PBO Need: **LOW**

Appellate Merit Assessments

Summary: PBO supports the public and the administration of justice by performing merit assessments for unrepresented litigants appealing to the Divisional Court or Court of Appeal for Ontario (prior to submitting facts) or seeking leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. Volunteer lawyers review decisions under appeal and assess clients' prospects of success. Clients whose cases are deemed meritorious are eligible for additional assistance from PBO through its [Full Representation Programs](#), described below. The program aims to help clients understand their chances of success, remove cases of doubtful merit from the legal system, and screen clients for additional assistance.

Volunteer Supports: PBO liaises with clients, maintains volunteer anonymity during assessment processes, has staff lawyers available to discuss cases, and handles all correspondence to and from clients during the assessment process.

Commitment: 1-2 merit assessments per year. Ideal for litigators with at least 5 years' experience or significant appellate experience. Prior participation in PBO's Hotline or Law Help Centres preferred. Volunteers can perform assessments from any location.

PBO Need: **MODERATE**

Courtroom Advocacy Programs

PBO's courtroom projects improve the administration of justice, level the playing field for unrepresented litigants, and provide lawyers with practical courtroom experience. Volunteers can act as amicus lawyers or duty counsel, explaining the law to unrepresented parties, supporting settlement negotiations and ensuring that litigants make informed decisions.

Court of Appeal Amicus Program

Summary: Each Wednesday and Thursday, volunteer lawyers attend hearings of motions pending appeal at the Court of Appeal in Toronto (130 Queen Street West) as friends of the court. The volunteers assist the court by helping unrepresented parties understand the issues and advancing any reasonable arguments in support of their positions. The goal of the program is to ensure that unrepresented litigants are properly heard and that the court has the benefit of full argument before rendering a decision.

Volunteer Supports: PBO handles scheduling, arranges for court staff to provide motion materials for volunteers to review, is available to provide ongoing services that may be needed, and organizes ongoing involvement of pro bono amicus counsel if and when desired and appropriate.

Commitment: 4 full-day shifts per year (1 per quarter). Ideal for litigators with at least 5 years' experience or with experience in the Court of Appeal. Prior participation in PBO's Hotline or Law Help Centres preferred.

PBO Need: **MODERATE**

Divisional Court Amicus Program

Summary: Each Thursday, volunteer lawyers attend hearings of motions pending appeal or review at the Divisional Court in Toronto (130 Queen Street West) as friends of the court. The volunteers assist the court by helping unrepresented parties understand the issues and advancing any reasonable arguments in support of their positions. The goal of the program is to ensure that unrepresented litigants are properly heard and that the court has the benefit of full argument before rendering a decision.

Volunteer Supports: PBO handles scheduling, arranges for court staff to provide motion materials for volunteers to review, is available to provide ongoing services that may be needed, and organizes ongoing involvement of pro bono amicus counsel if and when desired and appropriate.

Commitment: 4 full-day shifts per year (1 per quarter). Ideal for litigators with at least 3 years' experience or with experience in Divisional Court. Prior participation in PBO's Hotline or Law Help Centres preferred.

PBO Need: **MODERATE**

Civil Practice Court Duty Counsel Program

Summary: Each Tuesday and Friday, volunteer lawyers attend hearings as duty counsel to self-represented litigants at Civil Practice Court in Toronto (393 University Avenue). The volunteers ensure that self-represented litigants in court for that sitting understand the issues, receive advice on their options, engage in effective negotiations with opposing parties, and appropriately address the procedural matters at issue.

Volunteer Supports: PBO handles scheduling and is available to provide ongoing services that may be needed.

Commitment: 4 full-day shifts per year (1 per quarter). Ideal for litigators with at least 2 years' experience or experience on Superior Court motions. Prior participation in PBO's Hotline or Law Help Centres preferred.

PBO Need: **MODERATE**

Small Claims Judgment Debtor Examination Court Amicus Program

Summary: Each Wednesday, volunteer lawyers attend Judgment Debtor Examination Court in the Toronto Small Claims Court (47 Sheppard Avenue East) as friends of the court. The volunteers assist the court by helping unrepresented parties understand the issues and advancing any reasonable arguments in support of their positions. Volunteers should also pay special attention to the possibility of helping to resolve the matter with an appropriate payment plan. The goals of the program are to ensure that unrepresented litigants are properly heard and that the court has the benefit of a meaningful attempt at resolution or full argument on any contested matters that may arise.

Volunteer Supports: PBO handles scheduling and is available to provide ongoing services that may be needed.

Commitment: 4 full-day shifts per year (1 per quarter). Ideal for litigators with at least 1 year's experience. Prior participation in PBO's Hotline or Law Help Centres preferred.

PBO Need: **MODERATE**

Small Claims Motions Amicus Program

Summary: Each Thursday in Toronto (47 Sheppard Avenue East) and Friday in Ottawa (161 Elgin Street), volunteer lawyers attend Small Claims motions court as friends of the court. The volunteers assist the court by helping unrepresented parties understand the issues and advancing any reasonable arguments in support of their positions. The goals of the program are to ensure that unrepresented litigants are properly heard and that the court has the benefit of full argument.

Volunteer Supports: PBO handles scheduling and is available to provide ongoing services that may be needed.

Commitment: 4 full-day shifts per year (1 per quarter). Ideal for litigators with at least 1 year's experience. Prior participation in PBO's Hotline or Law Help Centres preferred.

PBO Need: **MODERATE**

Full Representation Programs

PBO manages a variety of programs that match volunteer lawyers with clients for full representation. These are excellent opportunities for lawyers to dig into substantive issues and provide invaluable assistance to clients who have nowhere else to turn. Opportunities exist for barristers and solicitors.

Appeals Assistance Program

Summary: Volunteers are matched with clients who have been screened through PBO's [Appellate Merit Assessments](#) program, described above, or who have been named as respondents. Services are negotiated between the lawyer and client and may include unbundled representation or full representation. Volunteers can review or prepare pleadings or court materials, assist in negotiations with opposing parties, or take part in appearances before the Court of Appeal.

Volunteer Supports: PBO arranges the start of the lawyer/client relationship, provides template pro bono retainer agreements, remains available to address any issues that may arise, tracks the file to completion, and helps lawyers complete a pro bono services report so contributions are measured and recognized.

Commitment: Up to 2 cases per year, recognizing that the volume of these cases is low. Ideal for litigators with at least 5 years' experience or significant appellate experience. Prior participation in PBO's Hotline or Law Help Centres preferred.

PBO Need: **LOW**

Consumer Protection Panel

Summary: Far too many seniors and vulnerable Ontarians fall victims to door-to-door sales scams that leave them on the hook for products they do not want or cannot afford. Even worse, predatory sellers systematically securitize consumer debt by registering Notices of Security Interest against heaters, water filters and HVAC units, etc. These NOSIs are levers to extract monies from people who need to refinance their homes or sell their properties. Volunteer lawyers are matched with clients seeking legal remedies before the Small Claims Court and Superior Court.

Volunteer Supports: PBO screens clients for eligibility prior to referral, and provides free CPD, knowledge management articles and precedents.

Commitment: 3-5 cases per year, recognizing that this volume is manageable because the matters have significant similarities. Ideal for litigators with at least one year's experience. Prior participation in PBO's Hotline or Law Help Centres preferred. Lawyers from across Ontario are needed for this program.

PBO Need: **HIGH**

Education Law Program*

Summary: Inadequate special education supports, bullying and unfair discipline can create unlawful conditions that keep kids out of school. Volunteer lawyers can help families in a number of ways that include coaching parents, drafting correspondence and appearing with families at school meetings or before administrative tribunals. This program is focused on resolving issues through advocacy.

Volunteer Supports: PBO screens clients for eligibility prior to referral, and provides free accredited CPD, precedents and mentorship.

Commitment: 1-2 cases per year. Ideal for litigators and in-house counsel. No prior experience required, but completing PBO's free CPD program is mandatory. Lawyers from across Ontario are needed.

PBO Need: **MODERATE**

Unaccompanied Minors Project*

Summary: Each year children arrive alone at Canada's ports of entry seeking refugee protection, or are identified as victims of human trafficking. As Designated Representatives, volunteer lawyers can connect the minors with legal aid lawyers, help prepare them for Immigration and Refugee Board hearings and speak to their issues.

Volunteer Supports: PBO screens clients for eligibility prior to referral, and provides free accredited CPD and mentorship.

Commitment: 1-2 cases per year. Ideal for litigators and in-house counsel. No prior experience required, but completing PBO's free CPD program is mandatory.

PBO Need: **MODERATE**

To volunteer for any of the above programs, please visit probonoontario.org/volunteer.