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**FOR JUSTICE**

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**AND**

**AWARD**

**CEREMONY**

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November 21st, 2019

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Dear Friend of VLP :

Thank you for joining us to celebrate the Bar's organized pro bono program, the Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc. (VLP). For 35 years, VLP has provided much needed legal services to our community. Their volunteers and staff help thousands of people each year and are truly champions for justice.



Enjoy the relaxed and fun atmosphere. Please take the time to bid on some of the great auctions items. Above all, enjoy the great food, drinks, and company of your colleagues.

Oliver Young

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Oliver C. Young".

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FOR BEING A  
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**From Bob Elardo**



Dear Friends:

Welcome to the VLP Champions for Justice Bash and Awards Reception. For 36 years, VLP has been the bar's organized pro bono program. We appreciate your help over the years and hope you have a great time tonight.

Tonight we will be honoring a wide range of people and entities that volunteer and our support our efforts to help low income people with real life legal problems. We have the pleasure of honoring veteran volunteers, new volunteers, and two honorees who went the extra mile and actually created new programs at VLP that expanded our reach into new communities and will allow us to serve even more low income clients.

VLP now has two fully staffed offices (in Buffalo and Batavia), over 40 employees, and over 500 active volunteer attorneys. This year, we are on a pace to represent over 5,200 clients with over 2,000 being handled by volunteer attorneys.

Over our 36 years, we have represented nearly 80,000 clients and provided information and referral service to over 80,000 more. Over 3,000 pro bono lawyers have represented over 40,000 of our clients and provided over 175,000 hours of pro bono time.

Those are results to celebrate!

Have fun and thanks for being here to help celebrate VLP's 36 years of "speaking for those who are not heard".

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R M Elardo".

Robert M. Elardo

Executive Director/CEO

ECBA Volunteer Lawyers Project

# AGENDA

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## AWARDS RECEPTION

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Crystal Room

4:30 pm to 5:30 pm

VLP will present awards to our Champions for Justice

## CHAMPIONS FOR JUSTICE BASH

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AAA & Marquis Ballrooms

5:30 pm to 8:30 pm

### FOOD

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Epicurean Display of Cheeses, Crudites, Dips and Fruit

#### PASSED HORS D'OEUVRES

Bacon Wrapped Chicken Satays with Brown Sugar Chili Glaze,

Assorted Crostinis,

Mini Quiches

#### CARVING STATION

Oven Roasted Turkey

#### ASIAN STATION

General Tso's Chicken and Vegetable Stir Fry

#### PASTA STATION

Tortellini in Pesto Sauce, Penne with Marinara Sauce,  
and Warm Garlic Bread

#### DESSERT

Assorted Desserts and Coffee Service

### PREMIUM BAR

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Enjoy the Open Bar from 5:30 to 8:30

### AUCTIONS

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Silent Auction - 5:30 to 7:50

50/50 Raffle - 5:30 to 8:00

Judicial Branch\* - 5:30 until prizes are gone

\* Everyone wins!

### GAMES

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Wine Bottle Ring Toss & The 19th Hole Challenge

5:30 until prizes are gone



# ECBA VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT

## MISSION OF VLP

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VLP's dual mission is to:

- (1) provide quality, free civil legal services for low income people and smaller not-for-profit groups; and,
- (2) to effectively involve volunteers in the delivery of those services.

VLP involves volunteer attorneys by recruiting, training, coordinating and assisting attorneys who volunteer to represent VLP's clients on a pro bono basis. VLP has been doing this work since 1983 when it was created as a joint project of the Bar Association of Erie County and Neighborhood Legal Services. The Bar Association incorporated VLP as a separate not-for-profit corporation in 1988.

Throughout the decades, VLP has been recognized as a quality provider of pro bono and direct civil legal services. In addition to the dozens of awards that our staff, volunteers, and Board Members have won for their work through VLP, the following awards were presented to VLP as an organization:

- 1991 New York State Bar Association *Award of Merit* for our "innovative" Attorney of the Morning Program (which has now been copied around the country)
- 1993 U.S. Department of Justice Immigration & Naturalization Service *Certificate of Appreciation* (for our Immigration Pro Bono work)
- 2012 Gerard Place *Outstanding Partner Award*
- 2015 Bar Association of Erie County *Justice Award* for our Family Court Help Desk and Pro Se Assistance Program
- 2017 National Association of Just Communities *Community Leader Award for Community Organizations*
- 2018 Bar Association of Niagara County *Pro Bono Legal Services Award*
- 2019 Buffalo Spree *Best Social Justice Group Award*
- 2019 WDNY *Robert H. Jackson Award for Distinguished Service* for our Pro Se Assistance Program
- 2019 NYS Unified Court System Office for Justice Initiatives and NYSBA for "*Outstanding Contributions to Pro Bono and Access to Justice*"

VLP's efforts are also cost effective for taxpayers! Last year, VLP's assistance to our clients resulted in local taxpayer savings of more than \$5.5 million! Taxpayer savings are realized through homelessness prevention, helping people stay off welfare, and helping our clients secure the child support or unemployment insurance benefits they are rightfully entitled to.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US TONIGHT

# 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

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## JUDICIAL AWARD

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This category is awarded to Judges, or members of their staff, who have gone out of their way to help facilitate pro bono work.

*Hon. Mary L. Slisz made a huge impact on our pro bono matrimonial work this year with the creation of Erie County's Matrimonial Mentoring Program. After being assigned to the Matrimonial Expedited Part, Judge Slisz saw the need to assist young lawyers and to increase access to justice for low-income litigants. With Judge Slisz at the helm, 21 experienced and talented practitioners signed on to share their knowledge one on one with attorneys new to the matrimonial practice while providing full representation on VLP referred pro bono divorce cases. This program supports and fosters the development of the next generation of matrimonial practitioners and provides legal representation to over forty low-income litigants who would otherwise have no access to legal representation. Judge Slisz hopes to run the program annually. Thank you, Judge Slisz, for your vision in creating a program that truly benefits everyone involved. You are a true Champion for Justice.*



## VLP "V.I.P." AWARD

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This award is for those who have been particularly important to the success of VLP and to the relative sanity of the VLP staff. This is due to the award winner's longtime commitment and willingness to help in ways in which few others are willing to.

*Lauren Mendolera, Esq. joined VLP's Board of Directors in 2018 and her commitment to VLP was immediately apparent. In addition to being on the board, she volunteered to be the board liaison to our newly founded young professionals' board, the Rising Champions for Justice. Lauren has been a true champion for VLP, bringing us into her firm to encourage her co-workers to volunteer and supporting all of VLP's events. She also completed 18 hours of pro bono service in 2019. In addition to her regularly scheduled volunteer opportunities, Lauren has graciously been one of our first calls when we need last minute coverage at our Federal Court Help Desk or when one of our volunteers has a conflict. She is always ready and willing to pitch in when needed. Lauren's dedication to VLP makes her a true champion for justice.*



## 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

### ATTORNEY OF THE MORNING AWARD

Attorney of the Morning (AOM) was created in 1990 out of the BAEC's Task Force on Voluntary Pro Bono. AOM operates in Buffalo City Court on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The NYSBA awarded its 1991 Award of Merit to the BAEC for its "innovative" AOM Program. Since then, it has been copied in other cities around the country.

*Mark Aquino, Esq. has been a proud VLP volunteer for many years, consistently serving clients through the Attorney of the Morning Program. Through this program, Mark has come to the aid of hundreds of Buffalo residents facing an eviction proceeding. Mark has dedicated over 70 hours to volunteer service with VLP and has helped well over one hundred families*



*avoid homelessness in the City of Buffalo. Not only has Mark proven to be a dedicated and reliable volunteer, he always is willing to pitch in and lend a helping hand while over in court. In fact, the statistics do not do justice to just how often Mark has handled a case simply because he had the time and wanted to help represent a tenant facing an eviction. In addition to his commitment to volunteering, Mark brings decades of experience to his work with VLP. His level of expertise always comes in handy when tackling tough cases and he is always available to help new attorneys navigate the process in court. For these reasons and more, we are thrilled to congratulate Mark on being a Champion for Justice.*

### **Client Story**

VLP received a call from a client who was about to be evicted from his home after a court order for nonpayment of rent. VLP successfully argued that our client was not a tenant but an owner of his co-operative unit who had fallen on hard times due to the loss of his job and that the co-operative actually owed our client several thousand dollars. VLP was able to work out a settlement wherein our client received \$5,000 and more time to move out on his own terms.

### **Did You Know?**

VLP is able to assist with housing issues in over 30 Town and Justice Courts across Erie County, outside the City of Buffalo?



## 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

### FAMILY COURT HELP DESK AWARD

Many family problems (such as paternity, support, orders of protection, custody and visitation) end up in Family Court. VLP's Family Court Help Desk was created in 2013 and recently celebrated its 6 year anniversary. It brings experienced Family Court practitioners, law students, and a VLP staff member together to provide brief counsel and advice for unrepresented Family Court litigants.

*Doug Stiller, Esq. generously donates his time to serving the low income clients at the Family Court Help Desk. He has been a consistent volunteer since the Help Desk's inception, and has advised over 80 clients on matters ranging from custody, to child and spousal support, to helping victims of domestic violence. Recently, Doug helped a young woman escape an abusive relationship by assisting her in drafting her petition, filing an Order to Show Cause, and obtaining an Order of Protection. Doug's extensive experience in Family Court makes the Court process more understandable and less stressful for pro se clients in the midst of a very challenging and emotional time. Doug also uses his expertise in Family Law by mentoring the law student interns at the Help Desk, teaching them the seminal case law, and giving them insight into the career of a Family Court solo practitioner. The clients and staff of the Family Court Help Desk are truly grateful for Doug's willingness to share his knowledge and for his dedication to expanding access to justice for our community. Congratulations and thank you Doug Stiller for being a Champion for Justice.*



### **FCHD Client Story**

Our 26 year old client came to the Family Court Help Desk after learning his brother was placed in a group home by his abusive adoptive mother. The attorney drafted his petition, then began full-representation of his case. The attorney obtained custody for our client. The child now resides with our client, our client's wife and their newborn son. Our client tells us his brother is doing well in school, and loves just being at home with his family.

### **Did You Know?**

Did you know that Niagara County has roughly 11 thousand Family Court petitions filed each year? VLP attorneys are available to discuss Family Court issue in Niagara County at our Niagara County Family Court Help Desk Wednesdays 11am to 1:30pm at the Niagara Falls Family Court, 775 Third St. Niagara Falls.

## 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

### COMMUNITY LEADER AWARD

Sometimes community leaders step forward and make a difference in the lives of low-income people, those that work to provide services to them, or both. When that happens, we take notice. This award is to recognize the efforts of such a community leader.

**Lee M. Redeye, Esq.** is an Associate Attorney at Lippes Mathias Wexler Friedman LLP. He is also a leader in the local Native American Community. In February 2019, Lee convinced Tom Gaffney (a Partner at Lippes Mathias) to arrange for a meeting with VLP. Lee presented his idea for creating a legal clinic designed to help people from the local Native American communities. Lee had the energy, commitment, and contacts to make it work. VLP agreed to coordinate the clinic and to have Vanessa Guite (a VLP Staff Attorney that is also a Native American) be the clinic coordinator. Lee arranged for the necessary space to be donated at the Native American Community Services. He also recruited volunteer attorneys to help staff the clinic, arranged for publicity within the Native American communities, secured funding for VLP's staff time, and volunteered to be at every clinic night. With that, the once a month Native American Legal Assistance Clinic was born and it launched in May 2019. Lee Redeye is a Champion for Justice.



Congratulations to all of tonight's honorees including our own Lee M. Redeye for his outstanding service as a community leader.



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## 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

### FEDERAL COURT AWARD

In early 2014, VLP began operation of the Pro Se Assistance Program (PSAP), a limited scope counsel and advice clinic in the Courthouse to advise pro se litigants involved in Western District of NY cases. This program is in partnership with the Federal Bar Association Western District of NY Chapter, the SUNY Buffalo Law School, and the Court.

*Anna Marie Richmond, Esq. has been supporting pro bono legal services and serving VLP's clients for decades. With cases dating back to the 1990s, VLP has been the lucky recipient of Anna Marie's time and knowledge for many years. Over this period of time, Anna Marie has assisted dozens of clients and donated over 130 hours of her time to representing underserved populations across Western New York. Since the inception of the Federal Court Pro Se Assistance Program, Anna Marie has been one of the most dedicated and reliable volunteers at the Federal Court Help Desk. There, Anna Marie provides advice and counsel to unrepresented litigants attempting to navigate the Federal Court system on their own. VLP is extremely lucky to have such an experienced and tenacious advocate assisting these clients on a regular basis. In addition to her invaluable legal expertise, Anna Marie always embraces the opportunity with work with law students at the Federal Court Help Desk. Always proving to be an inspiration to students, Anna Marie diligently takes the time to mentor students in the program any chance she can during her volunteer shifts. Time and again, Anna Marie has proven to be a true community partner with a demonstrated commitment to access to justice. VLP is very grateful to honor Anna Marie as a Champion for Justice.*



### IMMIGRATION AWARD

The Immigration Project at VLP now has a staff of 23 full-time staff members focused on immigration law. It serves detained and non-detained men and women who are long term permanent residents or asylum seekers. The Project also handles cases involving special immigration benefits for juveniles, and non-citizens who have been victims of crime, including human-trafficking and domestic violence, and affirmative asylum seekers.

*Elizabeth Callahan, Esq. represented a client from Burundi in her request for asylum. VLP encountered the client while she was in detention, and she was extremely sick as a result of malnourishment she suffered while hiding in her country and her resulting inability to eat properly thereafter. The client was fleeing her country after she suffered horrific violence because of her religion and ethnicity. Following her release from detention, Ms. Callahan accepted her case and represented the client in immigration court for over a year. At the client's final hearing, Ms. Callahan's efforts led to a grant of asylum almost immediately. After direct examination of the client concluded, the government's representative stated she had no questions for the client and agreed that she had met her eligibility for asylum and our client was able to stay in the U.S. Thank you Elizabeth for being a Champion for Justice.*



## 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

### IMMIGRATION AWARD

***Nevin Murchie, Esq.**, a local immigration attorney, has been a repeat VLP volunteer since 2015. We appreciate that Nevin brings both immigration experience and a willingness to learn new areas of law under our mentorship to the table. He is now on his 3rd VLP immigration case, a petition for the abused spouse of a US citizen who refused to help her obtain legal status in the US. Nevin previously handled a similar abused spouse case as well as a deportation defense case for a long term permanent resident with minor criminal convictions being held at the federal detention center in Batavia. We hope we will be working with him on many future cases.*



#### **Immigration Client Story**

VLP's Buffalo Office represented an African woman and several children seeking asylum due to political persecution. Her husband was involved in an opposition political party in their country. As a result of his political involvement, soldiers came to their home and sexually assaulted our client and one of her older daughters in front of the whole family. VLP convinced the court that our client would face continued danger if returned home. The judge granted her asylum, and she is starting her new life in the United States.

### INCOME TAX CONTROVERSY AWARD

With so many people out of work, it is no surprise that the number of people unable to pay their income tax obligations has increased over the past few years. In addition, even those who are trying to pay their taxes can have trouble understanding and complying with our complex system of tax laws, and end up in trouble. VLP attempts to assist low income taxpayers who have controversies with the IRS by providing advice and, when needed, representation before the IRS concerning the establishment and collection of income tax obligations.

***Emma Savino, Esq.** is this year's recipient of the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic Award. Along with the other great work Emma has done for VLP, such as providing assistance at our AOM program, she also continues to assist an extremely vulnerable client in both a Federal and New York State tax issue. The client was at risk of losing access to her income and of having her driver's license suspended due to a tax issue that was due to no fault of her own. Emma has been crucial to ensuring the client's access to her income and ability to commute to work are protected. Emma's prompt and quality service to VLP's most vulnerable makes her a very deserving winner of the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic award.*



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## 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

### LAW STUDENT AWARD

Besides attorneys there are also law students, paralegals, law graduates and even college and high school students who volunteer in VLP's offices assisting the staff with all of the work that goes into interviewing the clients, processing the cases and operating the special projects. This award recognizes the outstanding volunteer efforts by a law student.

**Stephanie Verhage** worked as a summer associate in our DOH-funded program providing legal services to one of our most vulnerable populations--individuals and families impacted by HIV. During her time at VLP, she was an invaluable asset to the program. Not only was she empathetic and compassionate to our clients who are dealing with numerous legal issues, but she had exemplary legal research and writing skills. Stephanie was so dedicated that she stayed on and donated her time to VLP's Family Court Help Desk in the fall semester. She is the type of intern you dream of --kind, compassionate, efficient, diligent, and hardworking. We are honored to present her with the Law Student award this year.



### IN HOUSE VOLUNTEER AWARD

This award is for a VLP Volunteer who dedicates their time to not only take cases through VLP, but to join us in the office and hold a caseload. Our in house volunteers donate their time to help our clients and to increase VLP's ability to represent more clients in need.

**James Morrissey, Esq.**, an experienced Buffalo attorney, retired from the New York Attorney General's Office in spring 2018 after spending nineteen years as an Assistant Attorney General. Almost immediately, he began volunteering at VLP one day a week. He has made a huge difference for clients who VLP otherwise would have been unable to represent due to limited resources. His cases have included asylum filings for three political dissidents from Africa and a young gay man, all of whom face being tortured or killed if deported to their countries. On top of this, he has worked with two families to submit relative petitions to grant foreign born spouses lawful status. Without him, these people would have been on their own fighting the system, instead of being represented by a skilled advocate.



## 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

### COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD

Community partners help to make VLP better able to serve our pro bono attorneys as well as our clients. They help to fill in the gaps that our limited funding does not cover. Providing financial support is critical to the success of our programs. Our community partners are essential to our commitment to ensuring access to justice for all.

*Los Samaritanos is a local community group composed of pastors, church members, college students, and retired teachers from the Batavia, Albion, Buffalo and Rochester area. They provide assistance to immigrants who are released from the Detention Center in Batavia. When someone is released, they are dropped off at a local gas station with only the clothing they were wearing when they were arrested. They often do not have weather appropriate clothes, food, or money for their journey home. Seeing this need, Los Samaritanos came together in an effort to provide emergency shelter, cash, food or clothing to people who need help getting home from Batavia. They have also put together "dignity bags" - backpacks with snacks, toiletries and winter clothing which are available to anyone who is released from detention. Los Samaritanos have provided some much needed emergency assistance to countless clients and helped them get home safely. Thank you Samaritanos for being a Champion for Justice.*



### CORPORATE PRO BONO AWARD

Corporate attorneys support VLP by handling cases, donating their time to our limited scope clinics or by encouraging their employers to create policies encouraging pro bono work.

*Mark W. Warren, Esq., is the Deputy General Counsel for M&T bank. Mark has been committed to bringing pro bono service opportunities to attorneys at M&T for years. In 2018, M&T created an internal policy offering all of their employees 40 hours of paid work time to volunteer for charitable organizations. Mark capitalized on this new policy by introducing his legal team to volunteer opportunities through VLP. Through VLP's partnership with M&T we were able to train 40 corporate attorneys on how to do end of life planning for VLP clients. Mark has continued to take the reins, encouraging his people to take VLP cases and insuring that all the cases VLP refers to M&T are handled with care. Mark is a true Champion for Justice.*



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## 2019 Champions for Justice Award Winners

### LAW FIRM COMMITMENT AWARD

Law firms demonstrate their commitment to assist VLP and our low income clients in so many ways. Some handle labor intensive cases. Some handle a high volume of cases. Many provide financial assistance to support VLP's services.

The attorneys of **Personius Melber LLP** have supported VLP since early 2014 when we began operation of the Pro Se Assistance Program in Federal Court. Rodney Personius, Brian Melber and Scott Hapeman have



covered at least one shift each at the Help Desk every semester for the last five years and often times have stepped in at the last minute when called upon to cover a cancellation. Personius & Melber LLP has also been a regular financial supporter of VLP and this year, through Brian Melber, participated in our Summer Associate Program, spending time mentoring our interns and discussing what it's like to start your own firm and practice law in the Western New York legal community. The firm's high level of professionalism and significant, consistent support of VLP is greatly valued. Thank you, Rodney, Brian and Scott, for being Champions for Justice.

### RISING CHAMPION FOR JUSTICE AWARD

This award from the ECBA Volunteer Lawyers Project is conferred upon a young lawyer who has demonstrated a commitment to pro bono work and to ensuring access to justice.

**Christina Gullo, Esq.** was an obvious choice for this year's Rising Champion for Justice Award. Since her return to the legal community in Buffalo, Christina has been balancing a full time career in the private sector with consistent volunteering with VLP. Since 2018, Christina has handled countless shifts at the Erie County Family Court Help Desk. There, Christina has assisted over 40 families with a multitude of complex and often emotional Family Court issues. Through this work, Christina has repeatedly



proven to be a compassionate and dependable volunteer. As if tackling her full time job as a litigation attorney all while volunteering was not enough, Christina joined VLP's inaugural class of the Rising Champions for Justice in November 2018. Not only did Christina become a member of RCJ, she was elected Vice President and has been a reliable and dedicated leader for the entire Board. In addition to the many hats she must wear as VP, Christina is always eager to volunteer to help plan events and fundraise. She was an integral part of the success of RCJ's first ever fundraiser, Beers & Volunteers. Always proving to be a motivating force to those around her, Christina has demonstrated her dedication to access to justice and serving her community. Thank you Christina for being a Champion for Justice.

# 2019 Champion for Justice Award

This award from the ECBA Volunteer Lawyers Project is conferred upon a member of the legal community whose actions throughout his or her career have shown them to be a true Champion for Justice.



**Richard F. Griffin, Esq.**, has been rightfully called the “father of VLP”. During his terms as 1977-78 President of the Bar Association of Erie County (BAEC) and later as Chair of the BAEC Public Interest Law Committee, he advocated strongly for the creation of pro bono program in Erie County. Pro bono was not widely accepted at that time, but that did not stop Richard. He secured the funding to hire a work study law student during the summer of 1980 to research for Public Interest Law Committee regarding: (1) what other pro bono programs in the country were like; (2) whether there was a need for more representation of low income people in Erie County; and (3) how a pro bono program would affect the private bar. When the federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC) regulations were amended to require programs like Neighborhood Legal Services to spend 10% (later amended to 12.5%) of their LSC funding on private attorney involvement, Richard negotiated with NLS and the BAEC and NLS jointly created VLP in 1982. Richard served as the first Chair of the VLP Advisory Committee and VLP started handling cases in 1983. Five years earlier, he had also been the driving force in the creation of Legal Services for the Elderly (now called the Center for Elder Law & Justice). He has been supporting both organizations ever since and served as the Honorary Chair when VLP and LSED held a joint Anniversary Gala in in 2008. Throughout his career, Richard Griffin has been in a position lead others and he has lead them to assisting with access to justice. He is a true Champion for Justice.

The Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project  
and  
The Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County,  
in conjunction with  
The United States District Court for the Western District of New York,  
are pleased to announce the publication of proposed  
Local Rule of Civil Procedure 83.8 (*pro bono* service).



**Goals of the Proposed *Pro Bono* Plan:**

- Increase *pro bono* appointments to low income *pro se* litigants, including limited scope appointments for targeted portions of a case - e.g., mediation, amendment of pleadings.
- Create an equitable and transparent system for *pro bono* assignments through the establishment of a Volunteer *Pro Bono* Panel and default *Pro Bono* Assignment Wheel.
- Encourage quality *pro bono* representation by increasing the presumptive cap on reimbursable expenses through the District Court Fund to *pro bono* counsel and bestowing volunteer benefits and protections to *pro bono* counsel through VLP & VLSP.
- Create more opportunities for less experienced attorneys to obtain Federal Court litigation experience through *pro bono* representation, with the establishment of a Senior *Pro Bono* Panel comprised of experienced federal practitioners available for *pro bono* co-counsel assignments.

The Proposed Rule (83.8) is published for public comment on the WDNY website at:  
[www.nywd.uscourts.gov](http://www.nywd.uscourts.gov)

We applaud tonight's Champions of Justice volunteers for their dedication – and we share in your mission to support those in our community who need it most.



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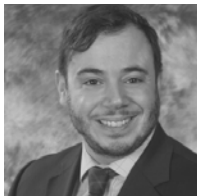
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Congratulations to the Director and staff on many consecutive years of organizational growth and expansion!

Cheers,

*Michael Charles Cimasi, Esq.*

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# VLP CLIENT STORIES

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## **Immigration Client Story**

VLP represented a client who had made a wage claim against his employer and was detained by ICE when he appeared for his deposition for the case in front of the Department of Labor. VLP successfully argued that he should be released because the client's former employer committed witness tampering by calling ICE on our client. The client was released on his own recognizance and is working towards obtaining legal status.

## **Family Law Client Story**

Our client's niece has battled heroin addiction for the last ten years. She abandoned her twin two year old daughters with our client. Our client was unable to get the children medical attention, enroll the children in pre-school, and had no legal standing to care for their needs. VLP helped her navigate the Court process and gain custody of the twins, along with all the rights to decision making for their care. We also connected her with a social worker who could help her get financial assistance.

## **Adoption Client Story**

Client was helped by VLP in the past to obtain custody of her granddaughter. After maintaining custody of her granddaughter for over one year, she sought assistance filing for adoption. VLP was able to assist client through the adoption process and finalize the adoption thereby ensuring the child is safe and client has all rights necessary to raise the child.

## **UIB Client Story**

A single mother of 3 was terminated from her employ of 2 years after sending a text to her coworker, asking for them to remain professional in the workplace. Even though the coworker repeatedly threatened our client, the employer did not terminate that individual. The Administrative Law Judge found for VLP's client, ruling that while the text might not have been ideal, it was understandable, and as such, she is entitled to her unemployment benefits.

## **VLP Thanks BAEC Dues Check-off Contributors**

VLP would also like to thank the approximately 1,000 lawyers and judges who made financial contributions through the Bar Association of Erie County Dues Check-off. Thank you. Your support does make a difference.

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