

PBRC Volunteer Profile



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MSBA Member; PBRC Volunteer

Can you tell me a little about your private practice?

We primarily represent consumers, including tenants' rights cases. We also represent people who are being sued by debt collectors. We represent people both in individual cases and class actions, and we also do personal injury.

What is your favorite kind of case?

My favorite is debt defense and the affirmative claims that come with those cases. Someone comes into my office after being sued by a debt collector. I look at the paperwork and figure out they should not have been sued at all, because the debt collector has violated federal or state debt collection laws.

How has the pandemic impacted your practice?

Early on, we became completely virtual. We do everything from home. I have had virtual hearings with the court, and we meet with clients virtually or on the phone instead of in person now.

Which of PBRC's projects do you volunteer with and what do you do there?

I volunteer with the Consumer Protection Project at the affidavit judgment docket in Baltimore City District Court. We provide advice and help consumers to present a defense to the lawsuit that has been filed against them. We review their documents, talk with them, and advise them about their options for entering a defense or working with the other side. The project is currently working with in-person or remote volunteers.

What do you find interesting about the work?

It's usually the first time the client has gotten to tell their story, or to even talk to somebody about the issue. I think the best part is being able to allay some of their fears - a lot of clients are hopeless. They think they are going to have their bank accounts or wages garnished, and they are scared.

There is almost always a defense or a way that we can reach out to the other side and work out a payment arrangement or provide some other advice. We get some cases dismissed entirely.

Even a payment plan is much better than the client simply getting a judgment against them, which could lead to wages being garnished, or bank accounts being levied. It can be the difference between getting by, and having a car repossessed or becoming homeless.

How does remote volunteering compare with in-person volunteering?

There's not a huge difference. I can videoconference with the clients, and I can see all their paperwork, because PBRC has the equipment available. I review the documents, talk to the client about the case, and provide advice.

The advocate on site will go with the client and talk to the judge, and I don't have to make the trek downtown anymore. I can join the meeting when a client is ready to talk to me. Between clients I can work on other things. So, as far as the time commitment, it has decreased.

Is there a moment or a memory that stands out for you?

I remember one client - an older woman who was a cosigner on a lease for a family member renting an apartment. We didn't get that case dismissed, but she was able to make a payment arrangement. Still, she sent me a card in the mail afterwards to express how thankful she was for helping her talk to the other side, negotiate the payment arrangement, and explain everything. She ended up having to pay, but she was just so thankful to have someone she felt was on her side. I kept that card for a long time.

What keeps you doing pro bono?

For me, it's about being in the client's corner when they feel like the entire world is against them. As lawyers, we can make a huge difference for a lot of people.

What message would you give to an attorney who is considering volunteering?

It's easier than you think! PBRC will train you to handle the cases and provide mentorship. There is always a PBRC attorney at the clinics, to help you get over that initial fear. It's not going to eat up all your time, and you can make a real difference for somebody else.

For more information about volunteering in Maryland, contact: Dave Pantzer, PBRC Director of Education, Outreach and Technology: dpantzer@probonomd.org, 443.977.6721