Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland
30 years of volunteers ensuring justice
Annual Report FY2020 (July 1, 2019–June 30, 2020)
December 2020
Dear Friend:


This is how we marked 2020 – and how we will long remember it.

We could not anticipate at the beginning of 2020, the year in which we looked forward to celebrating our 30th Anniversary, that we would need to make such radical adjustments to our organization and our everyday lives. We entered 2020 full of pride in three decades of diverse and far-reaching accomplishments, buoyed with hope for continued impact and sustained by dreams for a better, more just world. But the world shifted with Covid-19 and in response to the crisis, much as we have done with disparate crises before, PBRC pivoted to be responsive to the community’s immediate needs. Within a week of the pandemic shuttering businesses, PBRC’s resilient team had established remote offices and new online services for clients. Instead of in-person community and courthouse clinics, legal consultations by phone became the norm and team members engaged in wide-spread community outreach efforts establishing legal information hotlines and offering concrete help to those who were suddenly without recourse.

Since 1990, as the pro bono arm of the MSBA, PBRC has been connecting volunteers for justice to people and neighborhoods in need. Over the years, PBRC has been uniquely positioned to recruit, train, and facilitate the integration of thousands of dedicated lawyers into a coordinated network of programs offering free legal services for the most vulnerable in our state. As thought leaders, we spearheaded the development of innovative projects that targeted those not being effectively reached by others, such as unaccompanied immigrant children, seniors facing loss of their homes, low-income consumer debtors and tenants facing eviction. PBRC received national recognition for our foreclosure prevention work, whereby we orchestrated the state’s largest issue-focused pro bono effort resulting in legal lifelines for thousands of at-risk homeowners. We incubated the first day-of-court volunteer program model for consumers and tenants, teaching others to do the same. Consistently prioritizing partnerships and leveraging resources, PBRC was tapped as the lead coordinating agency in a multi-partner initiative to help seniors age in place. And through these efforts, we frequently advocated and inspired systemic changes to improve the justice system and experience of those attempting to access it.

Most of our work impacts low-income communities of color, persons with disabilities and those without support systems. These last few months have exacerbated and further highlighted the inequities that still exist for many across our state, reiterating how vital our work is to ensure racial equity and social justice. Raised awareness in recent times has demonstrated even more profoundly the value we bring to the community and one another.

Like so many across the world this year, we equally faced enormous challenges engendered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our clients are more marginalized by exigent circumstances. Our volunteers and staff are stretched yet remain committed to helping those less fortunate. Our mission is more critical than ever. So, in wrapping up our 30th year, PBRC recommits to our purpose and broader vision of a stronger, more just, and equitable society for all. We are hopeful, through continuing partnerships within the bar, bench, legal services community and others, the support and compassion of our volunteers, the largesse of our donors, and the guidance of our vision for a better America, that the future is bright.

In gratitude,

Sharon E. Goldsmith
Executive Director

Maria Ellena Chavez-Ruark
President

Fiscal Year 2020 By the Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People Impacted</th>
<th>$1,301,938 Cost Savings to Clients</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6,654</td>
<td>This includes payments avoided as a result of case dismissals, reduced judgment amounts, and negotiated payment plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,003 Individuals Trained</td>
<td>2,977 Project Volunteer Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>2,351 Cases Closed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A BRIEF HISTORY OF PBRC

PBRC trains and deploys thousands of volunteers into the community, witnessing a threefold increase in pro bono cases handled by lawyers working with MLSC-funded programs.

1993

Hosts first statewide legal services conference with coalition of legal services providers, judges, law school faculty, social justice advocates, and private bar members. Partners for Justice Conference becomes annual signature event.

1999

At request of Chief Judge Robert M. Bell and DLLR, PBRC orchestrates massive Maryland Foreclosure Prevention Pro Bono Project which ultimately trains over 1,400 lawyers and saves thousands of homes from improper foreclosure during the height of the financial crisis.

2008

PBRC trains and deploys thousands of volunteers into the community, witnessing a threefold increase in pro bono cases handled by lawyers working with MLSC-funded programs.

2011

Incubates new Consumer Protection Project in Baltimore City and Prince George’s County District Courthouses, focusing on debt buyer cases affecting low-income consumers.

2014

Initiates Tax Sale Prevention Project in partnership with MVLS, in Baltimore City with community legal clinics saving the homes of very low-income homeowners with delinquent property taxes or water bills.

2015

PBRC asked to coordinate Project Household initiative with MD Legal Aid, MVLS and Senior Legal Services to help city seniors preserve home ownership and age in place.

2017

Establishes first and only Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day program in Baltimore City Rent Court, helping to prevent hundreds of evictions each year.

2020

Celebrates kick off of 30th Anniversary year with Chief Judge Mary Ellen Barbera and volunteers at recognition reception.

1990

MSBA incorporates Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland as its “pro bono arm” and delegates to PBRC the Court’s mandate to orchestrate a statewide pro bono initiative.

1998

PBRC encourages Court to establish blue-ribbon Maryland Judicial Commission on Pro Bono and is requested by Court of Appeals to staff the Commission.

2002

Works with Court of Appeals for successful adoption of revisions to the Maryland Rules regarding the definition of pro bono, and new rules establishing a statewide Court of Appeals Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Service, local pro bono committees in each jurisdiction, and required reporting of pro bono hours. PBRC supports Committee work.

2015

Starts Unaccompanied Children Project clinics for youth seeking Special Immigrant Juvenile Status as they flee terror in their home countries.

2015

PBRC asked to coordinate Project Household initiative with MD Legal Aid, MVLS and Senior Legal Services to help city seniors preserve home ownership and age in place.
Approximately 150,000 Failure to Pay Rent Complaints are filed every year in Baltimore City, and as 2020 winds down, advocates are gearing up for unprecedented numbers of evictions. PBRC’s staff and volunteers represent tenants in Baltimore City Rent Court and subsequent rent escrow hearings through the Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day program.

Together, the two projects provided immediate legal assistance to hundreds of unrepresented litigants, preserving their housing and reducing or eliminating unwarranted debt.

CAP held 201 in-court clinics during the year, and worked toward alternative ways to serve Marylanders when these dockets closed due to the pandemic. CAP pivoted to launch a hotline for consumers and tenants shortly after courts closed.

99% of tenant defendants are unrepresented in Baltimore City eviction actions.

This year, TVLD held a total of 162 clinics and volunteer lawyers represented over 600 tenants in their eviction cases.

76% of TVLD clients who were represented by a TVLD lawyer avoided an eviction on the day of their Failure to Pay Rent hearing.

“I just wanted to take a moment to thank you from the very bottom of our hearts! You all went above and beyond for us, and in such a short amount of time! We can’t even find the words to express our appreciation and our gratitude for what you have done!!”

- TVLD Client
Courtroom Advocacy Project

Consumer Protection Project

Resolving debt lawsuits to avoid crippling judgments

Each year, tens of thousands of Marylanders are sued under affidavit for outstanding debts. This expedited procedure is often used to collect on auto loans, medical debt, and consumer debt. The clients who come through the Consumer Protection Project (CPP) are from all walks of life, and are often overwhelmed by challenging personal circumstances. A substantial number of individuals have been victims of fraud, identity theft or improper collection practices. During the pandemic, many have lost a second job or contract work or suffered a medical setback.

At this critical moment before the court proceeding, a volunteer lawyer counsels the client and often can negotiate with the creditor to resolve or reduce the debt collection action. The savings for the clients is substantial; sometimes preventing wage garnishments or tough choices between paying medical bills and rent or debt.

Rachel’s Story - Help in a Hard Time

Rachel came to the CPP when she was sued by her credit card company for an unpaid bill. She had recently been shot in the neck, and her arm was immobilized. She was suffering a great deal of trauma and had moved to live with her grandmother in Baltimore.

The remote CPP volunteer listened to Rachel’s story and explained her options. The volunteer initiated a settlement negotiation with Rachel’s creditor which resulted in a significant reduction in the principal, and a workable payment plan for the balance.

Rachel was relieved to have the lawsuit resolved and avoid having a judgment entered against her. The creditor benefited from the plan as well since there was a greater likelihood that the judgment would now be paid.

99% of CPP clients who received continued representation achieved a favorable outcome in their case such as dismissal or reasonable payment plan.

$433,381 saved for clients.

366 consumers received day of court representation at CPP clinics.

210 consumers received continued representation.

“I was very impressed by how diligently my representative handled my case in order to get a verdict in my favor.” - CPP Client

“It's about being in the client’s corner when they feel like the entire world is against them.”
- Chelsea Ortega, Esq., CPP Volunteer
For many clients, the home is their one significant asset. Protecting their ability to maintain this asset and pass it to the next generation is crucial to hope for a more just and prosperous future.

PBRC leads a multi-faceted partnership to help stabilize seniors in Baltimore City through Project Household. With its partner agencies, including Maryland Legal Aid, Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service and Senior Legal Services, PBRC organizes legal community clinics in the most distressed neighborhoods in the city to help residents secure their homes and age in place.

Services include:
- Estate Planning / Advance Planning
- Utility Bill Assistance
- Tax Sale Prevention

In 2020, HPP sent over 6,600 postcards to Baltimore homeowners on the tax sale list and directed them to its website www.taxsalehelpbaltimore.org to guide them to self-help and other legal options.

Tamira's Story - Connecting in a Time of Crisis
Tamira, a 70-year-old widow from Prince George’s County, was concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in her area. She had five adult children and no plan in place for handling her affairs if she became ill. Tamira reached out to the Home Preservation Project in May.

Unable to meet in person due to the pandemic, a volunteer met with Tamira on the phone multiple times, guiding her in the successful preparation of a financial power of attorney and advance medical directive, and providing her with additional peace of mind. Tamira wrote to express her gratitude and comfort, stating, “I will always refer others to you. Thanks a million times over.”

“To see how grateful the clients are to hear from us reminded me that we are all in this together. Volunteering remotely does not diminish the impact we have on our clients. If we can each just help one person at a time – and we can – it makes a world of difference.” - Snehal Massey, Esq., Tax Sale Prevention Remote Volunteer

Edna's Story - Avoiding Tax Sale
Edna, a 79-year-old Baltimore woman, was proud of her lifelong record of paying her bills on time. However, in 2020, struggling with mounting medical bills from her dialysis, she found herself unable to pay a $3,000 tax bill and at risk of losing her home to tax sale. Dismayed, Edna called PBRC for help.

Due to Edna’s low income, the PBRC volunteer was able to point her to a tax credit that would cap her tax bill at $600. In fact, the credit could be requested retroactively for the past three years, which would help Edna pay down her medical debt. Finally, PBRC provided her with applications to the BH20 assistance program to get a discount on her monthly water bill.
Maryland Immigrant Legal Assistance Project

Connecting immigrants to help and hope

Maryland is home to more immigrants in removal proceedings, per capita, than any other state. There are roughly 36,000 cases presently pending in Maryland's Immigration Court.

Immigrant children with a lawyer are 4-5 times as likely to prevail in their immigration case than children without a lawyer. Combatting the tremendous shortage of immigration lawyers and the huge need for legal assistance among immigrants who cannot afford to pay, MILAP trains lawyers, as well as interpreters from all fields so they can consult with children and families in removal proceedings.

The Maryland Immigrant Legal Assistance Project (MILAP) runs the only walk-in legal clinic in Maryland's Immigration Court, serving as the first line of defense to hundreds per year. With volunteer lawyers and interpreters, the clinic offers free legal consultations and triages cases for other legal services programs for immigrants appearing before the court.

Volunteers speak one-on-one with unrepresented children and families, identify defenses to deportation, provide appropriate referrals to other nonprofits, and counsel them on what to do if they need to return to court without a lawyer. In a limited number of cases, MILAP also helps families prepare and file their applications for asylum.

“In a way, it's been a growth experience...we have all these things that other people want to come here for, and they want to work, and they want to contribute. It's just opened my eyes to a whole other world.”
- Deena Dugan, Ph. D., MILAP Volunteer

Since 2014, 15,773 unaccompanied children have sought refuge in Maryland.

Throughout the year, MILAP conducted a total of 91 in-person and remote consultation clinics.

Beatriz’s Story - Help Through Building Trust

In September 2019, Beatriz, a 30-year-old immigrant from El Salvador with a potential asylum claim, was facing removal from the United States. After arriving at immigration court with no lawyer to speak for her, Beatriz connected with an in-court MILAP volunteer lawyer. The lawyer took the time to listen to her story, and to provide counsel about her legal options and guidance for her next steps. Following the consultation, project staff kept in touch with Beatriz over time to ensure she had the resources she needed - legal or otherwise.

Then one day in February 2020 Beatriz unexpectedly reached back out to MILAP. Drawing on trust built over time, she revealed that since her court consultation she had become a victim of human trafficking. MILAP staff moved immediately to get help for Beatriz, and by the end of the day had successfully connected her with housing and medical care. Shortly afterward MILAP connected Beatriz with an immigration nonprofit who agreed to provide full representation for her asylum claim.
In addition to training advocates to serve through our own pro bono projects, PBRC works with many partner organizations to develop, promote, and host trainings in order to recruit volunteers for them as well. PBRC supports the entire legal services effort in this unique way. The trainings are offered at no cost to lawyers and other volunteers in exchange for a pro bono commitment. PBRC also coordinates free and discounted Continuing Legal Education from MSBA and other partner organizations for pro bono lawyers and legal services employees.

PBRC offers over 40 training programs across these topical areas:

- Consumer Protection/Debt Defense
- Copyright Law
- Criminal Record Expungement
- Domestic Violence Advocacy
- Estate Planning
- Family Law
- Foreclosure Prevention
- Immigration
- Landlord-Tenant
- LGBTQ Advocacy
- Litigation
- Nonprofit Law
- Property Law
- Special Education
- Tax Sale Prevention
- Veterans Assistance
- Utility Bill Assistance
- Youth Homelessness

Thank you to our community of instructors:

- Ouranitsa Abbas
- Richard Berwanger
- Deepa Bijpuria
- Mikhael Borgonos
- Louise Carwell
- Paul Chandler
- James Lance Conklin
- Thanh Van Doan
- Hon. Lisa Dornell
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- Alexa Siegel
- William Steinwedel
- Albert Turner
- Karen Wabeke
- Revée Walters
- Christina Wilkes
- Kayla Williams
- Swapna Yeluri

Support Services for All

Supporting All Volunteers

PBRC manages a statewide Litigation Fund, an annual grant funded by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC). The fund reimburses volunteer lawyers for many types of litigation expenses incurred during pro bono work such as process server fees, mileage, postage, and copying costs. Visit www.probonomd.org/litigation-fund.

In spring 2020, at the outset of the pandemic, PBRC led a series of Remote Legal Services Technology roundtables, as a timely resource for Maryland’s legal services community.
This year, PBRC welcomed the inaugural class of the Professional Skills Academy. Seventeen Fellows, in many cases, newer lawyers, were paired with experienced mentors, took a series of in-depth trainings, and donated more than 400 hours of pro bono service. With their skills, experience, and connections, PBRC is building a community of pro bono leaders for the future with broad community impact.

2020 Professional Skills Academy Fellows

Sarah Adkisson
Kate Anderson
Victoria Bethel
Kimberly Caspari
Elaina Christmas
Stephen Freeman
Jocelyne Gresock
Nancy Hudes
Angela Kuan
Kenneth Lemberg
Snehal Massey
Shavina Mukesh
Olamide Orebamjo
Sieglinde Peterson
Maura Ward
Nyasha West
Flavia Williamson

Leadership and Engagement

Partners for Justice Conference

First held in 1999, the Partners for Justice Conference is an annual opportunity for the entire legal, governmental and broader community to discuss critical poverty and justice issues affecting our communities. In 2020, due to the pandemic, PBRC released portions of the planned conference as free webinars.

Maryland Free Legal Answers

PBRC serves as the administrator of Maryland’s site within this national initiative of the American Bar Association. Qualifying Marylanders can ask legal questions on civil topics such as family law, rental and housing law, and employment law. In 2020, our volunteer lawyers served 356 clients. Maryland.FreeLegalAnswers.org
Advocacy

Individual advocacy is most effective when coupled with systemic advocacy. PBRC engaged in legislative advocacy around affordability of utilities and water access and worked closely with the courts on modifying remote and in-court procedures to ensure the safest and fairest means of opening the courthouse doors to the most vulnerable populations in our state. Of major significance was the effort to work in concert with other advocacy groups locally and statewide to promote a Tenant’s Right to Counsel. PBRC staff members also actively engaged in numerous coalitions, Task Forces, and neighborhood groups to ensure that the clients’ voices were being heard, including the Attorney General’s Covid-19 Task Force, Access to Justice Commission, Baltimore Renters United, Baltimore Right to Water Coalition, Coalition for Homeless Families and Children, Consumer Roundtable, MSBA Delivery of Legal Services Section Council, Rent Court Roundtable, Renters United Maryland, Special Status Work Group/Domestic Law Committee, Judicial Council of Maryland Judiciary, and Tax Sale Litigation Defense Group.

Public Education & Outreach

Given the significant changes in court procedures, confusion about the legal process and the closure of courts and community clinics due to COVID-19, PBRC identified innovative ways to educate the public about legal resources and offer accurate information. For example, many tenants mistakenly believed they could not be evicted. Team members engaged in heightened levels of community outreach techniques to alert potential clients of the changes in the law and legal services available, including distributing over 6,600 direct postcard mailings, social media posts, radio announcements, distribution of flyers to neighborhood and non-profit entities, website tools, materials in food pantry packets, and “Know your Rights” presentations to schools, social workers, housing coalitions, and community associations.
The Maryland Pro Bono Service Awards program honors outstanding lawyers, non-lawyers, and programs that have made significant contributions to the delivery of pro bono civil legal services to Maryland’s low-income citizens.

The 2020 recipients served in a wide range of case areas, including bankruptcy, criminal record expungement, children’s welfare, and immigration.

Usually recognized in person at MSBA’s June Legal Summit & Annual Meeting in Ocean City, the 2020 award recipients were honored by video presentations during MSBA’s November Legal Excellence Week.

### 2020 Recipients

- **Garrett Fitzgerald, Esq.**  
  Alex Fee Award

- **Jonathan Gladstone, Esq.**  
  Lee A. Caplan Award

- **John J. “Jack” Condliffe, Esq.**  
  Judge Robert M. Bell Award

- **Stephanie Joseph, Esq.**  
  Judge Robert M. Bell Award

- **Ellen Dew, Esq.**  
  Joseph Sakamoto-Wengel, Esq.  
  Distinguished Pro Bono Volunteer Award

- **Deborah Devan, Esq.**  
  Retired Pro Bono Volunteer Award

- **Judge Cathy Serrette**  
  Member of the Judiciary Award

- **Association of Corporate Counsel: Baltimore Chapter**  
  Government or Corporate Legal Department Award

- **Annapolis Immigration Justice Network (AIJN)**  
  Herbert S. Garten Special Project Award

- **Maryland Society of Accounting & Tax Professionals (MSATP)**  
  Non-Legal or Organizational Involvement Award

- **The Law Offices of Michael F. Connolly**  
  (granted posthumously)  
  Law Firm Pro Bono Service Award

Full videos highlighting our award winners can be found at [www.probonomd.org/awards](http://www.probonomd.org/awards)
Thank you PBRC Volunteers!

Naomi Abankwah
Ouranitsa Abbas
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Bill Woods
Ashley Worth
LeJuene Wynn
Angela Yepez
Jeanine Young Merriman
Cory Zajdel
Daria Zane

We cannot create justice without getting close to places where injustices prevail...We have to get proximate.

- Bryan Stevenson, author of Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption
2020 Donors and Funders
A Special Thank You to our Financial Contributors

Thank you to the following individuals and organizations who supported our work between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020. PBRC expresses our sincere gratitude that you have joined our community. If you have any questions about your contribution or would like to change how your name appears in this listing, please contact Linzey Powers at lpowers@probonomd.org or 443.703.3055.

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