

Columbia Law School – Pro Bono Program, Social Justice Initiatives
STUDENT-INITIATED PETITION

Compliance with Pro Bono Guidelines. A pro bono project is in compliance with Columbia’s Pro Bono Guidelines if it is:

1. **Law-related.** The project requires knowledge of the law and skills learned in law school for completion. **For the 2020-21 academic year only**, a program or individual that is not primarily law-related will qualify for mandatory pro bono credit if knowledge of the law is helpful to complete the project and the project concerns a topic approved by the Pro Bono Office such as the following: Covid-19; racial injustice; law enforcement reform; access to healthcare; elections (including election monitoring) or U.S. Census (NOTE: must be non-partisan); engagement with the Harlem community; environmental and climate justice; supporting grassroots and mutual aid organizations; and other topics that are approved by the Pro Bono Office.
2. **Supervised by an attorney** (either directly or indirectly). The attorney should be available to answer questions related to the project, provide guidance as needed, and must sign off on the final work product. **For the 2020-21 academic year only**, a supervisor will not be required to be a formal member of a state bar so long as the work does not generally require legal supervision, students are not asked or required to provide legal advice, and students are not asked or required to represent clients. In each case, a supervisor should be a person with expertise in the relevant subject matter, and who is responsible for: (i) assigning the particular task to the student; (ii) taking the steps necessary to assure the task’s successful completion, including training, oversight, and provision of model forms or other documentation; (iii) conducting an evaluative exit interview with the student; and (iv) evaluating the student’s work using the Program’s mandatory evaluation form.*
3. **In the public interest.** Examples include work that helps those who are under-represented, educates the public about the law, or deals with an issue of public importance from any side of the political spectrum.
4. **Uncompensated.** Students may not receive any form of financial remuneration (salary, stipend, grant, etc.) or academic credit (writing or other) for work associated with this project. If the work is being supervised through a clinic, the Professor must indicate that s/he is not currently enrolled in the clinic, or provide confirmation that the pro bono project is separate from the work required to receive academic credit. If the work is being done in a law firm, s/he may not receive pro bono credit for work done during a week in which s/he is being paid. Work done on behalf of paying clients at a law firm will not qualify for pro bono credit.

*Students must be careful not to engage in legal work without adequate legal supervision and should be familiar with ethical guidelines and the rules of professional responsibility concerning the unauthorized practice of law. In no situation should students represent themselves as attorneys.

Filing Instructions:

What: A Student-Initiated Petition must be completed for pro bono placements that are not “established,” (either listed as an in-house project or in the LawNet database) or are placements that fall within the exceptions under the Pro Bono Guidelines for the 2020-21 academic year. [Please read our FAQs](#) for additional situations where a Student-Initiated Petition is required, and please email probono@law.columbia.edu if you are not sure whether you need a Petition.

When: A Student-Initiated Petition must be filed *before you begin* pro bono service at this placement.

How: Submit forms or questions via e-mail to probono@law.columbia.edu.

Group Petitions: If the proposed project is to be performed by more than one student, the entire group should submit a single petition with a list of all participants attached. The group should designate a representative for the purposes of contact with SJI.

Student Name: _____ **Class/Grad Year:** _____

Email: _____ **Phone:** _____

If this is a Group Petition, please provide a list of all participating students’ names.

Is this petition being filed for a project that falls within the exceptions for the 2020-21 academic year?
(Y/N) _____

Name of Organization/Department/Firm for whom you are seeking approval:

Address: _____
Supervisor or Supervising Attorney: _____
Email: _____ Phone: _____
Task Supervisor (if different): _____
Email: _____ Phone: _____

Description of Organization/Department/Firm (please list the website and include brochures or other written material that might be useful to our review): _____

Project Description (Please be specific about the work you'll be doing. If you are performing research, please explain how this research will be used. Provide extra pages if needed): _____

Expected Start Date: _____ **Number of Hours Committed:** _____

Please describe in detail how your project satisfies the pro bono requirements outlined on the previous page.

Please have the Supervisor review and sign the following statement. Petitions will not be approved without the signature of the Supervising Attorney or Supervisor.

I acknowledge that _____ (name of student) is not an attorney who has been admitted to the bar and, as such, cannot represent or provide legal advice to _____ (name of organization/department/firm) or to its clients. The aforementioned organization/department/firm and its clients will not rely on the student's work product in taking any action or forbearing from any actions that may subject the organization/department/firm, or its clients, to legal process.

Supervisor's Signature: _____ Date: _____

To be completed by Social Justice Initiatives at Columbia Law School:

Date Petition Filed with SJI: _____
Signature of Pro Bono Program Representative: _____ Date: _____