



CASA CORNELIA
LAW CENTER

FAQs for Volunteer Attorneys

1. Q: What does Casa Cornelia Law Center do?

A: We are a public interest law firm providing quality pro bono legal services to victims of human and civil rights violations, with a primary commitment to the indigent within the immigrant community in Southern California. Casa Cornelia strives to educate others regarding the impact of immigration law and policy on society and the public good. We can only serve the hundreds of clients in need of our services because we have the support of Volunteer Attorneys from the private bar, who take cases pro bono through our Pro Bono Program.

2. Q: I am not an immigration practitioner, or I don't have much experience with immigration law. Can I still be a Volunteer Attorney?

A: Yes! The majority of our Volunteer Attorneys are not immigration practitioners. We provide training and a mentor (one of our Casa Cornelia attorneys on staff), who will be assigned to each Volunteer Attorney who takes a case. The mentor will be available to discuss the case, review drafts, and provide answers and guidance.

3. Q: What kind of pro bono cases do you have available for Volunteer Attorneys?

A: Our pro bono model is for Volunteer Attorneys to take full representation cases from start to finish as the attorney of record, under the mentorship of a Casa Cornelia staff attorney. Volunteer Attorneys may take asylum cases (defensive or affirmative) as part of our Asylum Program; children's asylum or SIJS (Special Immigrant Juvenile) cases as part of our Children's Program; or U Visa, T Visa or VAWA (Violence Against Woman Act) cases as part of our Victims of Crime Program. Please see our Programs pages for more information about each type of case.

4. Q: Does Casa Cornelia provide training to take pro bono cases?

A: Yes, Casa Cornelia provides trainings to prospective Volunteer Attorneys to take cases in all three program areas. Typically, the trainings take place on weekday afternoons at our offices, and are two hours long, plus a 15 minute break. MCLE credit is available. The trainings are free, with the expectation that attorneys who attend will take a pro bono case. Trainings are held on an as-needed basis, and may come on calendar quickly in response to client need. Please check our Upcoming Volunteer Trainings page frequently for updates, and to RSVP.

5. Q: How do I get started as a Volunteer Attorney?

A: The first step generally is to review opportunities in our three programs, and attend the training appropriate to the kind of case for which you would like to volunteer. Afterwards, we can start circulating available pro bono cases which may be a good match to you.



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6. Q: I am a transactional attorney, and/or I do not wish to appear in court. What kind of pro bono cases would be best for me?

A: U Visa, T Visa or VAWA (Violence Against Woman Act) cases as part of our Victims of Crime Program, as well as affirmative and children's asylum cases, are transactional and typically would not involve court appearances. Please see our Programs pages for more information about each type of case.

7. Q: I am not licensed in California, but in another state. Can I still be a Volunteer Attorney?

Yes! Most of our pro bono cases are limited to federal immigration law. Therefore, your active license in good standing from another state can be used to work on a federal immigration case. The exception is for SIJS (Special Immigrant Juvenile) cases as part of our Children's Program, where Volunteer Attorneys need a California license because the cases involve work in California state court. Otherwise, Volunteer Attorneys must maintain an active law license in at least one U.S. jurisdiction, and be in good standing.

8. Q: I am a retired or inactive California attorney and don't wish to reactivate my California law license. Can I still take a case or participate in a clinic?

A: Volunteer Attorneys must maintain an active law license in at least one U.S. jurisdiction, and be in good standing. We encourage you to consider the California State Bar's Pro Bono Practice Program, which allows attorneys with inactive California licenses to reactivate them exclusively to do pro bono work. The California State Bar excuses those attorneys in the program from paying annual Bar dues. Attorneys licensed in other states should check whether their respective State Bar Associations offer similar programs.

9. Q: I don't speak Spanish, or any other language besides English, and I understand that Casa Cornelia clients come from all over the world. Do you provide interpreters and translators to Volunteer Attorneys?

A: Yes, Casa Cornelia has an in-house Volunteer Interpreter and Translator (VIT) Program where we match Volunteer Attorneys with interpreters and translators who are community volunteers. The service is free of charge.

10. Q: Does Casa Cornelia have professional liability insurance that will cover Volunteer Attorneys?

A: Yes, Casa Cornelia's Lawyers Professional Liability Policy has a primary pro bono endorsement to cover Volunteer Attorneys.



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11. Q: What is the time commitment for each type of pro bono case?

A: It depends on the form of relief and the complexity of the case. Generally:

Defensive asylum cases: 120-150 hours

Affirmative asylum applications (not in court) or Children's Asylum Cases: 80 hours

T, U Visa or VAWA Applications (not in court): 50 hours

Guardianship (state court appearances for SIJS cases): 35-50 hours, plus SIJS applications: 20 hours

12. Q: I am not in a position to take a full representation case right now. How can I help?

A: Please consider making a contribution to support Casa Cornelia's humanitarian work. Your gift will help us to fulfill our mission and recruit others to take cases pro bono and serve our clients, even if you cannot at this time. Thank you!

13. Q: I am interested in pairing up with another Volunteer Attorney I know from my firm, or the legal community. Can we team up and take a case together?

A: Absolutely. Volunteer Attorneys often team up to work on cases together.

14. Q: Do you have legal clinics where I can volunteer?

A: Yes, Casa Cornelia holds legal clinics as part of our Victims of Crime Program, where Volunteer Attorneys help screen potential clients. Typically the clinics are on a weekday evening, and are preceded by a mandatory MCLE training from 3-4pm, followed by the clinic from 4-7pm. Please check the Upcoming Volunteer Trainings page for opportunities.

15. Q: Why don't you publicize the specific dates of your upcoming legal clinics? I need the date in order to know my availability to volunteer.

A: Given the vulnerable populations we serve, we do not publicize the clinic dates on our website. Thank you for your understanding. Please follow the instructions on the Upcoming Volunteer Trainings page to indicate your interest.

16. Q: Can you please add my name to the e-blast list of available cases?

A: At this time, there is not a list of available pro bono cases that we disseminate widely through email, nor are the cases listed on our website. Select cases are sent to Volunteer Attorneys we have trained, who are known to us, and who have indicated they are ready for a case. Due to the nature of the cases we represent, we do not widely publicize descriptions of available pro bono cases. Thank you for your understanding.



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17. Q: I am an Attorney who is fluent in another language, and I wish to serve as a Volunteer Interpreter/Translator, instead of taking on a pro bono case myself. Can I do that?

A: Yes, we would be very happy to have you volunteer as a VIT (Volunteer Interpreter/Translator). Attorneys fluent in Turkish, Vietnamese and Pashto, for example, have devoted great service to our clients as VITs. Please follow the instructions on the Interpreters and Translators section of our website.

18. Q: What is Casa Cornelia doing in response to the child separations and asylum protections under threat by recent case decisions, and is there anything I can do to help you?

A: Since 2001, Casa Cornelia's attorneys have been the sole providers of pro bono legal representation to immigrant children detained in San Diego, and we will continue to serve them - including those who have been separated from their families. We have also served adult asylum seekers fleeing persecution and violence for 25 years. The children, women, and men who are on the news are also in our office every day. Here at Casa Cornelia, we are ready to continue fighting for the lives of those we serve. Regarding family separation, we are uniquely situated to assist with making connections between parents and children because we have access to both the detained adults and the detained children. The policies are changing fast around us. Currently the most helpful thing for attorneys to do would be to consider signing up for the appropriate training and taking a pro bono case, and also to consider making a [donation](#) to Casa Cornelia. To the extent we add extra projects for attorneys, we will disseminate that information as appropriate.

19. Q: What kind of recognition does Casa Cornelia give its Volunteer Attorneys?

A: Casa Cornelia holds its annual La Mancha Awards in October, attended by hundreds, where we honor our volunteers who have provided outstanding pro bono service. We also nominate attorneys who have devoted 50 or more pro bono hours within a calendar year to receive the California State Bar's Wiley W. Manuel Award. Additionally, we organize events to honor, re-engage and re-connect with our valued Volunteer Attorneys.

20. Q: I have reviewed the Volunteer Attorney FAQ, and I still have questions, and wish to connect with someone.

A: Please contact Casa Cornelia's Pro Bono Program Director Katherine Paculba Lacher, at kpaculba@casacornelia.org, or 619-231-7788 x304.