
VANDERBILT LAW

PRO BONO PLEDGE FAQ



VANDERBILT
Law School
Public Interest Office

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New York Bar Pro Bono Requirement

Who can answer my questions about the New York Bar's Pro Bono Requirement?

If you have questions about the New York Bar's Pro Bono Requirement, please review the information at the following links:

- [NY Courts Pro Bono Bar Admission Requirements](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions about the Rule](#)

Once you have reviewed this information, please contact the NY Courts at ProBonoRule@nycourts.gov with further questions.

The program is administered by the New York Courts. The Court is the final decision-maker regarding whether hours are eligible for their bar requirement. Therefore, the Public Interest Office does not answer questions about the New York Bar Pro Bono Requirement.

Is the Pro Bono Requirement the same as the Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge?

The pro bono admission requirements for the New York Bar are separate from the requirements of Vanderbilt's voluntary Pro Bono Pledge program. Hours for the New York Bar Requirement are not tracked by Vanderbilt Law School.

It should also be noted that the definition of "pro bono service" for New York Bar purposes departs somewhat from the Vanderbilt Law School Pro Bono Pledge definition of "pro bono work." You should always review the New York Bar pro bono requirement to ensure the opportunity can be counted towards that requirement.

I found an opportunity to use towards the Pro Bono Requirement. What should I do before I start?

If you plan to utilize an opportunity towards the New York Bar requirement, you should always speak with the supervising attorney prior to participation to ensure they will complete the required paperwork. All paperwork should be collected at the completion of the project and not at a future date. Additionally, you should honor your commitments to a project, even if the project hours exceed the hours needed to complete the requirement.

Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge

What is the Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge and why should I complete it?

The [Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge](#) is a commitment made by Vanderbilt Law students to dedicate a portion of their time to pro bono legal work and community service during their law school career. The purpose of the Pledge is to recognize students who engage in pro bono, public interest, and community service activities while enrolled at Vanderbilt Law and to encourage greater student participation in practicing law for the good. The pledge is strictly voluntary.

Three-year J.D. students must complete 75 hours of service to complete the Pledge, while transfer students must complete 50 hours of service and LL.M. students must complete 25 hours. At least two-thirds of this time must be served in law-related activities and ten hours of the Pledge must be performed in the Nashville metropolitan area.

Students who complete the pledge are invited to participate in the spring Pro Bono Happy Hour and recognized at a school-wide, end-of-year ceremony. Students also receive an honor cord to wear during law school graduation. The student with the highest number of logged hours for the academic year also receives special recognition and a second honor cord to highlight their commitment to public service.

Where can I find pro bono opportunities?

[Paladin](#) is our main hub for distributing in-house pro bono opportunities and connecting with vetted legal services organizations (LSOs) nationwide. Through your dashboard, you can [search and sign up for opportunities](#) that match your interests and availability.

That said, below are some resources where you can find other pro bono opportunities outside of those listed in Paladin:

- 1) *Pro Bono Distribution List*: When you sign the [Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge](#), you will be added to a distribution list and receive one-off and/or discrete opportunities that we receive throughout the year that may not be distributed school wide. When a quick turnaround is required, we will continue to utilize this list instead of posting in Paladin.
- 2) *Nationwide/Remote Opportunities*: Paladin is a great resource for finding nationwide/remote pro bono opportunities at LSOs of all sizes, but some organizations may seek pro bono volunteers through different means. [PSJD](#) is a good resource for finding on-going pro bono opportunities. Some larger, nationwide organizations maintain their own volunteer lists. Two examples of well-known organizations that provide remote opportunities are [Lawyers for Good Government](#) and the [Election Protection Coalition](#).
- 3) *Direct Communication*: We encourage you to seek out legal organizations doing work you are interested in and communicate with them directly to ask about pro bono opportunities. The only caveat is to ensure you are contacting *legal* services organization that have a license attorney on staff to supervise/review your work.

What is the difference between pro bono and law-related community service?

Pro bono work must be supervised by an attorney. Law-related community service may have a legal element to it—but the work is not supervised by an attorney. Street Law, for example, is considered law-related community service because students provide “Know Your Rights” presentations but, because they are not supervised by an attorney, cannot apply the law to specific situations.

For Street Law students developing new materials or new presentations, you may count these hours towards the Pledge if a licensed attorney reviews the research and presentation. In these cases, you will need to note the new presentation and list the supervising attorney in the system.

Please see the *Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge Decision Tree* at the end of this document.

I am an international student. Can I participate in pro bono work?

International JD and LLM students who are interested in participating in pro bono opportunities should contact [International Student & Scholar Services](#) prior to participating.

What Qualifies for the Pro Bono Pledge?

I worked pro bono as a summer associate at a law firm this summer. Does this count towards the Pledge?

If you received compensation for your work, the hours do not count towards the Pledge. While the firm may have gone uncompensated, you were paid for your work. That said, students who work with a firm on a pro bono issue and do not receive compensation can count those hours as non-credit bearing pro bono work.

I received a stipend for my internship this summer. Can I count my hours towards the Pledge?

Yes! Students who receive a stipend for summer work can count all non-credit bearing hours towards the Pledge.

I clerked for a judge this summer. Does this experience count towards the Pledge?

No. The judiciary does not qualify as providing assistance or advocacy on behalf of a person of limited means; or an organization seeking to secure or promote access to justice. That said, some judges are the exception. If you believe this to be the case, please email vls.probonopledge@vanderbilt.edu with additional information.

I received academic credit for pro bono work. Can I count these hours towards the Pledge?

Yes! The Pledge allows students to log up to 25 hours of credit-bearing pro bono work towards the 75-hour requirement. That said, if a student exceeds the hours required by the course, they can log the additional hours towards the non-credit bearing pro bono requirement.

For example, the In Nashville Summer Externship Course (LAW 7905) requires 5 weeks of full-time work to receive credit but the student worked for 8 weeks. The 5 weeks of work required by the course would count towards credit-bearing pro bono work while the additional 3 weeks counts towards non-credit bearing pro bono work. These instances will need to be recorded separately in Paladin with their respective categories and the non-credit bearing hours will need to include a note explaining that the hours recorded exceeded the course requirements.

Do community service hours count towards the Pledge?

Yes! Students can count up to 25 hours of community service work towards the 75-hour requirement. Community service work does not have to be law-related. However, the work does have to be uncompensated and in service to disadvantaged, disenfranchised, or have a benefit to the general public. Students may also count service hours performed on behalf of any Vanderbilt Law student organization or organized effort that serves underserved or otherwise disadvantaged individuals or communities as community service.

Recording Hours Towards the Pro Bono Pledge

When should I enter my hours towards the Pledge?

Students should enter their pro-bono hours as they complete them to ensure the hours are correct. That said, you are not required to track your hours as you go.

How do I record my hours towards the Pledge?

All pro bono hours will be logged in [Paladin](#).

Paladin-sourced opportunities will automatically feed into the “My Participation” table on your Volunteer Dashboard when you express interest in the opportunity. From this table, you can [edit the opportunity](#) to add or update your hours. Hours for all Paladin-sourced opportunities should be entered this way to ensure naming consistency which will allow for better and more efficient tracking of these opportunities.

Opportunities found outside Paladin can also be logged towards the Pledge. From your Volunteer Dashboard, click “+ New External Opportunity” and complete the information requested in the pop-up form. Detailed instructions can be found on [Paladin’s Help Page](#).

How do I track my progress towards the Pledge?

When you log on to Paladin, you will see a tracker in the top left corner of your Volunteer Dashboard. This will show your progress towards completing the Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge as well as your hours for the current academic year.

What is the Legal Aid Society credit (LAW 5800)?

This credit is for students who complete an independent pro bono project or work with a local non-profit for at least 55 hours a semester. It is not for students who serve in leadership or other roles with the Vanderbilt Legal Aid Society.

I have reviewed this FAQ and still have a question!

Further questions can be directed to vl.s.probonopledge@vanderbilt.edu.

Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge Decision Tree

Please note that the Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge Decision Tree on the next page assumes that the work performed fits the definition of pro bono or law-related community service outlined in the [Vanderbilt Law Pro Bono Pledge](#).

WHERE YOU PAID FOR YOUR WORK?

Yes

No

WAS THE WORK
SUPERVISED BY AN
ATTORNEY?

No

Yes

DID YOU RECEIVE
ACADEMIC CREDIT
FOR THE WORK?

Yes

No

COMMUNITY SERVICE:

- JD students can count up to 25 hours
- Transfer students can count up to 17 hours
- LLM students can count up to 8 hours

CREDIT BEARING PRO BONO:

- JD students can count up to 25 hours
- Transfer students can count up to 16 hours
- LLM students can count up to 8 hours

NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE PLEDGE:

Work must be uncompensated to be considered pro bono work. A summer stipend is not considered compensation.

NON CREDIT BEARING PRO BONO:

- JD students must log at least 25 hours
- Transfer students must log at least 17 hours
- LLM students must log at least 9 hours