

## **Solidarity Center**

### **International Lawyers Assisting Works (ILAW) Network**

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Solidarity Center is a Washington, D.C.-based, non-profit, non-governmental organization, affiliated with the U.S. labor movement, whose mission is to promote worker rights in approximately 60 countries throughout the world.

In 2018 Solidarity Center launched a new global network of international union and worker rights lawyers and scholars to facilitate the sharing of information and expertise, more effective collaboration, and joint strategizing over issues and cases that increasingly transcend national boundaries.

The network – International Lawyers Assisting Workers (ILAW) – operates both online through a members-only website ( [www.ilawnetwork.com](http://www.ilawnetwork.com) ) and phone app, and (outside of pandemic times) in person through regional and global meetings and conferences.

ILAW offers a variety of services to its member lawyers, including a global directory of labor and worker rights lawyers and allied legal professionals; a library/clearinghouse of news, research articles and case materials in the fields of labor and employment law; a space for blog-format and listserv discussion and debate on legal developments; and a forum for webinars and other topical educational and training opportunities.

An ILAW Advisory Board consisting of 20 lawyers from 20 countries (four from Asia, three from Africa, four from South America, three from Europe, two from North America, one from Australia, and two from global organizations) provides guidance to a staff that consists of three US-based attorneys, and three regional attorneys (based in Nairobi, Bogota, and Tbilisi).

For now, ILAW is focusing on several broad topic areas: global supply chain accountability, migrant worker rights, the fissured employment relationship, employment discrimination in all its forms, the informal economy, organizing and bargaining with multinational employers, occupational health and safety, public sector issues, trade union rights, and -- over the past nine months -- COVID-19-related issues.

Given the global nature of work and common trends that affect workers worldwide, an international network is needed now more than ever to effectively represent workers in these areas.

The platform provides materials in English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Russian, and Arabic and we hope to be able to offer additional languages over time, as resources permit.

In the two years since its creation, ILAW has grown to include approximately 600 members in more than 70 countries. It held an in-person global convening in Mexico City in November, 2019, attended by lawyers from some 35 countries.

## Pro Bono Net NYU Law | LLM Pro Bono Research Project Project Proposal

### I. Organizational Background

[Pro Bono Net](#) is a national nonprofit working to bring the power of the law to all by building cutting-edge digital tools and fostering collaborations with the nation's leading civil legal organizations. From connecting attorneys to those most in need, to creating legal tools to help individuals advocate for themselves, we make the law work for the many and not the few. [LawHelpNY](#), which is powered by Pro Bono Net, is New York's statewide legal information website providing access to Know Your Rights information, DIY court forms, as well as referral information for over 250 free legal service providers. LiveHelp is a real-time chat feature of LawHelpNY, through which visitors can obtain tailored assistance from a LiveHelp Operator in navigating resources to find the information they need related to the legal issues they're facing.

LawHelpNY has extensive legal information which covers a wide array of civil legal topics, such as housing and family and safety law. LawHelpNY also has a featured legal service provider tool, which enables users to locate legal services within their locations. LiveHelp, LawHelpNY's bilingual chat program, available in English and Spanish, provides legal assistance, information and referrals to LiveHelp chat. Trained volunteers staff LiveHelp from 9 AM-9 PM on weekdays, making this service readily accessible to low-income working clients, individuals in rural areas, or people who may be homebound, elderly or living with disabilities. At the beginning of the pandemic, New Yorkers needed a way to understand changes in laws in real time and LiveHelp's demand significantly increased. As a result, we created a [COVID Resource page](#), which was constantly monitored and updated to reflect the legal changes being made in response to the pandemic. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, LawHelpNY has remained at the forefront of providing up-to-date legal information and referrals for LiveHelp chat users.

### II. Project Purpose

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that many individuals' access to justice has been further hindered and navigating the legal arena has become a lot more difficult. Despite limited court accessibility in New York due to social distancing restrictions, the need for court involvement in housing-related and family-related matters continues to be a need among many New Yorkers. Even with the creation of emergency New York and federal legislation, meant to offset the significant impacts of the pandemic, many New Yorkers are seeking legal help, particularly in housing and family law.

In regard to housing law, an eviction moratorium was introduced as a means of preventing individuals impacted by the pandemic from being evicted. In 2020, the Tenant Safe Harbor Act and the COVID-19 Emergency Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention Act of 2020 were enacted. Despite these protections being created in response to the pandemic, tenants' rights violations continue to exist at high rates. Since the beginning

of the pandemic, there have been many alleged incidents by LiveHelp chat users of landlords conducting constructive evictions, such as using self-help, refusing to make required repairs, and harassing tenants. This is evidential proof that the COVID-19-related housing laws and protections could only be effective to a limited extent.

Furthermore, website pages on LawHelpNY concerning legal issues relating to family law also saw massive upticks in user engagement. With New York courts acting in limited capacity, it became difficult to find legal remedies and enforcement for a variety of family-related situations. For example, many LiveHelp users made allegations of violations of existing orders and were seeking legal assistance with rectifying such violations. There were many alleged incidents of orders of protections being violated, as well as child support orders and custody and visitation orders violations. In addition, the concern of domestic violence cases became prevalent as well. During the pandemic, navigating these types of legal issues have become very complicated for many New Yorkers, especially for low-income individuals.

Access to justice remains a key challenge in the daily lives of low-income and poverty ridden New Yorkers. With limited availability to legal services, many struggle to navigate the court systems and find solutions to their legal issues. Problems with regard to access to legal assistance have been clearly displayed during the ongoing pandemic. With access to legal service providers being limited to remote access, limited court operation, and a slew of other challenges, it has become clear the pre-pandemic model of providing in-person legal services is no longer sufficient in meeting the needs of unrepresented, low-income New Yorkers.

LawHelpNY and LiveHelp for LawHelpNY's current model of service delivery, as innovative as it may be, lacks the ability to assess and understand the massive barriers which exist in navigating legal services and user outcomes. Despite our innovative approach to providing legal service to the public, we are limited in our ability to evaluate and interpret whether the LiveHelp service leads to positive legal outcomes to individuals. Without tools to measure outcomes, or the assessment of current legal outcomes resulting from provided services; there remains no clear picture of the effectiveness of our programs and their ability to provide access to legal services. Furthermore, without a clear understanding of the limitations of New York legislations and protections, particularly in family and housing rights, we cannot continue to expand our tools and resources into reliable, up-to-date resources. As such, this project seeks to answer the following questions:

- How has the pandemic created new barriers in Housing and Family law rights?
- How has legislation and changes in law impacted the accessibility of justice in Housing and Family Law?
- Does LiveHelp's chat service lead to positive legal outcomes to chat users who seek legal assistance from our services, and;
- How do we measure our success and impact?

Accessibility to legal services and resources remains a constant struggle for low-income New Yorkers. Through the results of this project, our program hopes to increase the access to legal services and resources by way of bridging gaps and eliminating barriers to positive legal outcomes for vulnerable populations. This project is merely a

fragment of the work which needs to be done; however, its potential to create societal change is great. With your help, unfettered access to justice can be transformed from a dream into a reality for all.

### **III. Project Activities**

Through this project, NYU's LLM students will be tasked with researching legal topics in housing and family law and identifying the impact of legislation in creating sustainable remedies to legal challenges. LLM Students will also assess what new barriers have arisen because of the COVID-19 pandemic in housing and family law. Through their research, students will be able to assist LawHelpNY in understanding the changes our program needs to make to our service delivery model to better serve the broader New York community.

Moreover, LLM students will be tasked with reviewing LiveHelp's model of service delivery, researching a systematic approach to assessing legal outcomes for our target population, recommending a path forward to uniformly gather, evaluate, and report on such information. Using available data from Pro Bono Net and LiveHelp for LawHelpNY, students will assess the quality of legal resources provided to chat users and the pathways users take because of the legal information and referrals provided by LiveHelp operators. This information can be used to identify legal service gaps in comparison to the current needs of the public, as well as any deficiencies in the LiveHelp service delivery model. Further, students will make recommendations for ways to measure our success in producing positive legal outcomes, as well as providing insight into the current outcomes we have obtained from website users. In addition to suggesting ways to measure and evaluate outcomes, students will utilize issue spotting skills, legal analysis, and problem-solving skills.

### **IV. Project Timeline**

Research for this project will be conducted throughout the spring semester. Below is a breakdown for the suggested project timeline:

- May 24-29, 2021:
  - Project participants will receive a project onboarding. Participants will meet with staff to discuss the goals of our project, expectations and breakdowns of assignments.
  - Students will receive specialized training on our LiveHelp platform and will be scheduled to participate in a practice live chat. The purpose of the practice chat is to gain perspective and insight on services being provided, as well as insight into legal issues in which users continually seek assistance for.
- June 1-4, 2021:
  - Students will meet with staff to discuss and understand how to access necessary data, as well as how to incorporate data into their research while identifying gaps within our service model and its correlation to housing and family law.

- Students will be provided with necessary sets of organized and structured program data which will be required for ongoing research.
- Students will also be given recommendations and guidance as to the laws and specific legal topic areas of housing and family law to focus their research on.
- June 7-11, 2021 to February 26, 2021:
  - Students will begin their reach with the specific goal of identifying legal barriers citizens face while accessing legal remedies and the solutions to their legal issues.
  - Students will meet weekly with project staff to assess progress of tasks; and discuss challenges and questions that they may have.
  - Students will also be given access to an individualized Slack channel, and other technological platforms, where they can communicate and ask any questions they may have as they arise.
- June 14-17, 2021:
  - Students will use legal barriers they identified in their research of the law to analyze and assess LawHelpNY's Tools and delivery service model.
  - Students will use research, provided data, and experiences from LiveHelp to provide solutions on ways to measure impact in providing positive outcomes to users and evaluating LawHelpNYs impact in bridging gaps within legal barriers.
  - Students will continue to meet with the Project Staff regularly to give project updates and receive feedback and recommendations for ongoing work.
- June 21-July 2, 2021:
  - Students will begin to compile findings into an organized and structured report for LawHelpNY.
  - Students will continue to meet with Project Staff to give updates on their ongoing report.
  - Students will hand in finalized reports by the suggested deadline of July 15, 2021. *This is just a suggested date and can be adapted and changed to suit the needs of the students, and not interfere with their final examination preparation.*
  - Students will have their hours confirmed after reviewing their weekly timesheets which will be provided within the first week of the project. Affidavit processes will be completed in compliance with NYU's requirements.

## V. Project Staff

The Project Staff will consist of four members. Below you will find the names and titles of each team member for the proposed project:

1. Veronica Dunlap, Esq., *NY Programs Director and Supervising Attorney*
2. Wantee Ramkaran, Esq., *NY Programs Senior Program Associate*
3. Sebastian Zavala, Esq., *NY Programs Supervising Attorney*
4. Dennis Brink, *LawHelpNY Americorps VISTA*