

PUBLICATION

A Disheartening Reality: The Rise In Domestic Violence Pro Bono Matters

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Over the past year, as stay-at-home orders and quarantine requirements were put in place, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) braced itself for a surge in domestic violence incidents. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, NCADV reports that on average, during one year in the United States, approximately ten million women and men are physically abused by an intimate partner (<https://ncadv.org/statistics>). The number of domestic violence related calls police departments received drastically increased in February and March of 2020. For example, beginning in March 2020, Chicago reported a 14.6% increase in the number of domestic violence calls made to the Chicago Police Department, Boston reported a 22% increase and Dallas reported a 20.3% increase in domestic violence calls to their respective police departments. (Bucchino, Rachel, "Domestic Violence Cases Surge Amid-Stay-at Home Orders," *The Hill*, April 13, 2020, <https://thehill.com/homenews/news/492506-domestic-violence-cases-surge-amid-stay-at-home-orders>).

While these tragic incidents were on the rise, there became an increased need for attorneys to provide pro bono legal services to the low-income victims of domestic violence abuse. Many victims of domestic violence also experience financial abuse, where the victim's abuser refuses to give the victim access to bank accounts, which means the victim does not have the monetary resources to hire an attorney. This is where the importance of pro bono shines through yet again.

As these pro bono matters can be very sensitive for the victims and counsel involved, attorneys often wonder how they can be of service for these pro bono matters. Although all pro bono domestic violence cases are different, some of the most common legal assistance needed by individuals who find themselves in such a situation include, but are certainly not limited to:

1. Filing for a protective or restraining order;
2. Handling custody battles for minor children;
3. Filing for divorce; and
4. Pursuing criminal charges against the abuser (i.e., for criminal or aggravated assault).

There are several organizations that have put the accessibility of legal services to low-income victims of domestic violence at the forefront of their missions, including the [Victim Rights Law Center](#), the [DC Volunteer Lawyers Project](#), and the [Arizona Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project](#). However, it is not uncommon for any city or town's local pro bono organizations and legal aid societies to have domestic violence matters in the queue, waiting for an attorney volunteer.

It is a disheartening reality that the number of domestic violence pro bono matters have been on the rise over the past year; however, it is an issue that is actively being acknowledged, addressed, and combatted through the help of various pro bono programs that can always use more attorney volunteers.