



Supreme Court of Illinois

February 11, 2020

SUPREME COURT ANNOUNCES VOLUNTEER *PRO BONO* PILOT PROGRAM TO REDUCE CRIMINAL APPEALS BACKLOG

The Illinois Supreme Court today announced a pilot program utilizing volunteer *pro bono* attorneys to reduce the backlog of criminal appeals that are currently pending with the Office of the State Appellate Defender (OSAD) across the state.

In this six-month pilot program, *pro bono* attorneys will help reduce the backlog by substituting for OSAD in certain criminal appeals. The pilot program will launch in the First and Second Districts of the Appellate Court with managerial assistance from the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. Upon favorable assessment of the pilot program, it would be expanded to include the Third, Fourth and Fifth District Appellate Courts.

“The backlog of criminal appeals cases presents a serious access to justice problem that is of great concern to the Supreme Court. I want to thank Appellate Court Justices Bertina Lampkin and Donald Hudson for their hard work organizing this pilot program,” Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Anne M. Burke said. “Similar programs have been used in other states to help reduce backlogs. We look forward to the program’s successful implementation in the initial test phase and to its eventual implementation throughout the state.”

Interested attorneys are asked to fill out the “Volunteer *Pro Bono* Program Attorney Application” available [here](#). The applicant will be asked to provide information necessary for participation, including appellate experience, willingness to work under the supervision of counsel approved as a volunteer attorney in the program, prior experience clerking for a Supreme Court or Appellate Court Justice, or working in the appellate division of a state or federal agency. Other criteria for approval as a volunteer *pro bono* attorney include up-to-date malpractice insurance, no ARDC disciplines and five years’ experience as a licensed attorney with no ARDC disciplines. Applicants who do not meet the criteria may still participate if the applicant agrees to work under the supervision of an attorney who has the requisite experience.

“The expeditious resolution of criminal appeals is crucial to a fair and efficient criminal justice system. Implementation of the Supreme Court’s *pro bono* program will serve a vital role in helping to secure a just and prompt determination of criminal cases on appeal,” said Second District Appellate Court Justice Donald C. Hudson, Chair of the Appellate Court Administrative Committee. “On behalf of the Appellate Court Administrative Committee, I wish to express our appreciation to the Supreme Court for this important and progressive initiative.”

Under this program, the OSAD will assign cases to an approved *pro bono* attorney, who then has seven days to decide whether to retain the case. Once the new *pro bono* attorney files a motion to substitute as counsel, OSAD will make a motion to withdraw. Cases in the pilot program will consist of direct appeals in both jury and non-jury cases, with a record of 1,300 pages or less. Oral argument in these cases will be strongly encouraged so approved attorneys can gain valuable experience arguing before the Appellate Court.

“In anticipation of the launch of the Supreme Court’s *Pro Bono* initiative, I spoke with the Appellate Lawyers Association, the *pro bono* directors of many law firms, and other members of our legal community,” said Justice Bertina Lampkin, First District, Appellate Court and member of the Appellate Court Administrative Committee. “I want to thank them all for their input and for embracing this program with great enthusiasm and support. The overwhelming response I received is a powerful demonstration of our dedicated legal community working together to reduce our State’s backlog of pending criminal appeals. I am confident that *pro bono* counsel will use their valuable skills and expertise to provide their clients with effective and expeditious representation.”

OSAD currently has available the following materials to assist volunteer attorneys in their preparation of briefs on appeal: Criminal Law Handbook and Monthly Digests, Handbook on Briefs and Oral Argument, and Illinois Supreme Court Pending Issues. These items are available on the OSAD website by clicking [here](#). OSAD will also provide online video training on appellate advocacy to volunteer attorneys who are interested.

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(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Chris Bonjean, Communications Director to the Illinois Supreme Court at 312.793.2323 or cbonjean@illinoiscourts.gov.)