

THE IELLA LEGAL AID PROJECT IS SEEKING VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS

by Rina Gonzales

For nearly 30 years, the Inland Empire Latino Lawyers Association (IELLA) has provided free legal assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families who reside in either Riverside or San Bernardino County.

IELLA's mission is to provide free high-quality legal services to low-income individuals through a volunteer attorney panel and to pursue equal justice for all clients served.

IELLA is currently recruiting attorneys for our volunteer attorney panel. The commitment of attending on a bi-monthly or monthly schedule is very much appreciated and needed at this time. The following are the most frequently asked questions we get from potential attorney volunteers.

Q: What type of cases would I be expected to assist with?

A: The great majority of cases are family law (divorce, child custody, paternity). Landlord/tenant (tenant's rights), collections, other civil/consumer law and small claims are the other primary areas that volunteer attorneys advise on.

We do not provide advice regarding immigration or criminal law matters. If cases implicate the need for such an attorney, a referral is provided.

Q: Do you need to speak Spanish to be a volunteer attorney?

A: NO. We always have translators at the clinic to assist. I need assistance myself, as I do not speak Español.

Q: Can I get a reminder call?

A: YES. Our clinic manager, Laura Price, will call and/or email to remind you that your day to help is upcoming.

Q: What is the actual time commitment?

A: If you are able to commit to one day a month for about two and a half to three hours (most attorneys arrive at 5:15 p.m. or so), that would be wonderful. If you want to elect a bi-monthly schedule, just let Laura know and that can be arranged.

Q: Is there any recognition?

A: YES. Well, other than feeling really great and having clients endlessly say, "Thank you" – yes, there is more. If you donate over 50 hours in a year, you get a Wiley Manuel certificate from the State Bar. We also have an annual recognition event in December to honor our volunteers.

Q: When and where are the clinics?

A: Weekly clinics are Mondays in Colton at the Lawrence Hutton Community Center and Wednesdays in Riverside at

the César Chávez Community Center. Monthly clinics are also held in Riverside's Eric Solander Community Center (last Saturday) and Ontario's De Anza Community Center (second Thursday). IELLA also holds a small claims clinic the third Thursday of each month at the César Chávez Community Center.

Q: Am I expected to take cases back to my office?

A: NO, but we would LOVE it if you could take at least two per year. There's no obligation for you to take any work out of clinic. However, our grant funding does require that we have outside clinic cases (i.e., negotiations/settlements) taken on by our volunteer attorneys.

Q: Does IELLA have insurance to cover the volunteer attorneys?

A: Yes, IELLA has legal malpractice insurance to cover all volunteer attorneys.

Q: Does IELLA provide any sort of orientation or training for those who do not practice in the areas emphasized in the clinics?

A: Generally, the orientation/training is accomplished by sitting in with a seasoned volunteer attorney to see firsthand how questions and advice are handled during a client meeting.

Q: What if an emergency arises and I can't make my clinic date?

A: We hope this doesn't happen, but just in case, we would appreciate that you try to give us as much notice (i.e., 48 hours) as possible. If we don't have enough attorneys for a particular clinic, we end up turning clients away, and we hate to do that. If you can find a replacement for your clinic spot, that is definitely best for the clients!

Q: I want to become a volunteer attorney. Whom do I call so I can sign up to volunteer?

A: If you are interested, please call or email the IELLA Clinic Manager, Laura Price, at (951) 369-5846 or lprice@iellaaid.org, to schedule your clinic dates. She will assist in making sure you learn the ropes as a new volunteer attorney.

Rina Gonzales is the Board President of the Inland Empire Latino Lawyers Association.

