

The National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) is dedicated to ensuring human rights protections and access to justice for all immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Based in Chicago and with five offices across the country, NIJC provides direct legal services to and advocates for all immigrants through policy reform, impact litigation, and public education. Since its founding more than three decades ago and thanks to the support of thousands of pro bono attorneys from the nation's leading law firms, NIJC has been unique in blending individual client advocacy with broad-based systemic change.

## **VAWA Protection:**

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was signed into law in 1994 as part of a larger crime bill to address domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. VAWA was amended in 2000, 2005, and 2013 to include special provisions for battered immigrants that allows them to gain legal immigration status without relying on their abusive U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident spouses, parents, or children.

Immigrant survivors of domestic abuse may be eligible to file a self-petition under VAWA if they:

- Have a qualifying relationship to an abusive legal permanent resident or U.S. citizen,
- Have been subjected to battery and/or extreme cruelty,
- Have resided with the abuser,
- Currently reside in the United States, and
- Can establish that they are a person of good moral character.



Non-citizens do not have a right to counsel. Pro bono counsel provides legal stability and security for survivors of violence, and their families. Qualifying family members may be included as derivatives on the self-petition. Some immigrants qualify to file their application for legal permanent residency simultaneously with the VAWA self-petition.

## **Pro Bono Representation in a VAWA Self-Petition Involves:**

- Direct client engagement including interviewing clients and document collection
- Preparing client affidavit in support of self-petition
- Preparing and filing applications
- If the client and any derivatives are eligible for legal permanent residency, filing the necessary application(s) and representing the client(s) at the interview at the local U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

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## Our Pro Bono Partnership

- Pro bono attorneys are expected to:
  - Participate in a training
  - Provide interpretation and/or translation services, as needed.
  - Produce a comprehensive application that includes a detailed client affidavit and supporting documentation.
- NIJC provides:
  - Trainings conducted by asylum experts
  - Policy and practice updates regarding any changes within the immigration system that may impact clients
  - Detailed practice manuals, practice advisories, and samples produced
  - Technical support through the life of the case
- Expected Number of Hours: pro bono attorneys can expect to dedicate 20 – 40 hours to file the case. Adjudication may take several years and pro bono attorneys are expected to maintain the case and contact with the client through the final decision.



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## Project Contact Information

For more information, please contact Lizbeth Sanchez at 312-660-1318 or [lisanchez@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:lisanchez@heartlandalliance.org).

We invite you to see all of NIJC's extensive pro bono resources available on our website at <https://immigrantjustice.org/for-attorneys>.

To connect with individuals and families who need legal representation, please see the [current case list](#) available on our web page.

For general information about NIJC Pro Bono Programs please contact Ellen Miller, Pro Bono Manager, at 312.660.1415 or [emiller@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:emiller@heartlandalliance.org).



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