

PROLAW CASE STUDY PUBLIC COUNSEL

MORE RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY NEEDS
THROUGH THE POWER OF PROLAW



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CELEBRATING MORE THAN 10 YEARS WITH PROLAW

Public Counsel is the largest pro bono law firm in the nation, with board members and participating attorneys comprising the who's who of large national and global law firms. Founded in 1970, Public Counsel has a staff of 61 attorneys and 52 support staff along with more than 5,000 volunteer lawyers, law students, and legal professionals who assist more than 32,000 children, youth, adults, and families every year.

The value of the free legal services provided by Public Counsel in 2011 is conservatively estimated at more than \$88 million. Every dollar donated to Public Counsel is leveraged into more than \$15 in services to the community.

Public Counsel's far-ranging activities impact a wide spectrum of people who live at or below the poverty level and the community-based organizations who serve them. Public Counsel is dedicated to advancing equality and opportunity by delivering free legal and social services to the most vulnerable members of the community through projects, or practice areas, that include Appellate Law, Center for Veterans Advancement, Children's Rights, Community Development, Consumer Law, Early Care & Education, Homelessness Prevention, Immigrants' Rights, and Impact Litigation.

Scot Moore, Director of IT since 1996, had been managing the growing number of matters, volunteers, and staff through seven separate databases custom built for Public Counsel. Although this system kept the firm afloat for several years, it was not optimized to track and report on the type of information so critical to the firm and its supporters.

Moore knew there had to be a better way. In 2001, he began evaluating other non-profit legal-specific solutions, but they did not match the unique needs of Public Counsel. Then he found ProLaw® at the LegalTech Los Angeles show, which led to an easy decision for both organizations.

"Our attorneys simply couldn't do the work that they do without the terrific technical support that we receive from Thomson Reuters Elite's incredible team."

Hernán Vera
President and CEO

Moore and the team instantly saw the value in ProLaw's single database with front and back office information, and ProLaw's executives knew that Public Counsel was a worthy cause to provide a solution and ongoing services on a gratis basis. Public Counsel and Thomson Reuters Elite are proud to be celebrating more than ten years of their continuing partnership.

According to President and CEO of Public Counsel Hernán Vera, "For more than a decade, Thomson Reuters Elite has been a critical partner in our efforts to provide desperately needed legal services to vulnerable communities throughout California. Our attorneys simply couldn't do the work that they do without the terrific technical support that we receive from Thomson Reuters Elite's incredible team."

MANAGING STEADY GROWTH

ProLaw has played an instrumental part in managing the firm's growth on many different levels. Moore has been able to successfully scale ProLaw as Public Counsel has grown from a small to a mid-sized organization. Over the past 10 years, the number of individuals the firm has assisted has increased 36%, the number of volunteers has increased 76%, and the number of in-house attorneys has grown from 23 to 51. "For a medium-sized firm, we have a huge number of clients," says Vera.

PUBLIC COUNSEL

As the largest pro bono law firm in the nation, Public Counsel has a staff of 61 attorneys and 52 support staff along with more than 5,000 volunteer lawyers, law students, and legal professionals who have assisted more than 32,000 low-income children, youth, adults, and families every year.

STRATEGIC GOALS

To standardize on a common platform in order to scale, better track, and analyze its matters and contacts.

WHY PROLAW?

Built from the ground-up on a single database, ProLaw is an integrated software suite designed to automate the practice and manage the business of law.

BENEFITS

- More collaborative work environment to better handle complex cases across projects
- Ability to track and analyze volunteer attorneys and clients to meet needs of community supporters
- Standardized processes to maintain accurate and complete data

During this period, the complexity of the cases has increased as well. For example, an asylum case for a torture survivor from Cameroon may take up to ten years, and the legal status of that survivor’s children might require the services of volunteers from three different firms. ProLaw enables Public Counsel to track all of the details in a single database.

Additionally, ProLaw has enforced a standardized process across all the firm’s projects to ensure the staff is capturing and tracking the same information in the same way, which has been extremely valuable. The firm currently tracks more than 150,000 matters and contacts in ProLaw. Standardized data fields enable staff to access the complete story on every matter, whether it is a current case or one that closed years ago, which was difficult, if not impossible, with the firm’s previous system.

“Implementing ProLaw was a huge jump in our ability to manage the firm, while at the same time reducing administrative tasks,” adds Moore.

“Our service delivery model relies on a close relationship with volunteers, and ProLaw serves as our front line means of tracking communication with them.”

Hernán Vera

ABILITY TO TRACK AND REPORT

Tracking clients and cases

The importance of Public Counsel’s ability to track information on the various parties involved in a case cannot be overstated. Not only does ProLaw enable staff to track individual cases, but also to generate accurate and complete reports on the demographics of clients and volunteers, a requirement of various foundations and the state bars that support the non-profit.

“Each year our supporting organizations are asking for deeper analysis of the people we are helping in the community,” explains Vera. “We can run reports in ProLaw based on very specific parameters, such as the ethnicity breakdown of the clients we helped in certain East L.A. zip codes. ProLaw has enabled us to be much more responsive and confident in the reports we produce.”

For instance, Moore and his team produce a year-end report every January. Previously, this process took several weeks to complete. With ProLaw, the annual report is now produced in a matter of days.

Tracking volunteers

“Our service delivery model relies on a close relationship with volunteers, and ProLaw serves as our front line means of tracking communication with them,” explains Vera.

Public Counsel staff feeds updates on matters from volunteers directly into ProLaw, including the cumulative time a volunteer attorney spent on a particular case when necessary. Following firm procedures—entering in notes, records, client conversations/phone calls, and so on—helps the matter progress through the system in a standardized fashion whether it is handled in-house or by a volunteer.

Tracking time

Public Counsel never issues an invoice, but the staff does track time on cases that require that information. For example, the firm might sue a city that failed to build housing for its residents as required by state law. Let’s say it lasted two years and finally resulted in a victory. Public Counsel has the opportunity to submit a request for fees from that city. In order to do so, the firm would need to generate time records to validate its fees, and ProLaw easily enables the team to capture and report on time entries— even on an as-needed basis.

ADOPTIONS PROJECT ADOPTS PROLAW

Public Counsel’s Adoptions Project, which is located in a remote office at the Los Angeles Children’s Court, most recently implemented ProLaw to manage contacts and matters and is proving how valuable it can be. Moore developed a custom tab for the project to track its unique data fields. Specifically, the Adoption team tracks the barriers to and length of the adoption process.

“We were called in by the court system to help with the significant backlog of adoption cases, which was negatively affecting the kids. By working closely with the court, we were able to eliminate the backlog and process adoptions more quickly,” Vera says. “With ProLaw now fully integrated with the Adoptions Project, we can run reports that highlight certain issues and trending information so that we can proactively problem-solve together with the court.”

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

An inherent benefit of having all client, volunteer, and case information in a single database is the natural collaboration that occurs across projects. "We often help clients with more than one legal need. ProLaw's integrated database encourages further cross-project work that was difficult to do before," said Vera.

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ENCOMPASSING SUPPORT

In 2010, Thomson Reuters™ extended its support of Public Counsel by offering free access to a suite of different Westlaw® databases and services to assist with cases. Plus the company is providing help with Public Counsel's library and IT needs through technology support and assistance.

Furthermore, Cary Burch, President of Thomson Reuters Elite, is a current Board member, which entails enabling the work and mission of Public Counsel in many different ways. The employees at Thomson Reuters Elite have also provided support through direct services to help the homeless and recruiting a team for the Public Counsel's Run for Justice, which is an official charity of the Los Angeles Marathon.

"As a non-profit, we rely on the generosity of the community to help fund our services. The Thomson Reuters support has enabled us to be more responsive to the needs of our clients and supporters, and we are very appreciative of their continued support," says Vera.

For more information about ProLaw, please call **(800) 977-6529** or visit prolaw.com.