

PROLAW CASE STUDY

ARIZONA OFFICE OF
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

PROLAW INTEGRATION STREAMLINES STATE AGENCY WORKFLOW



THOMSON REUTERS™

ARIZONA OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

PROLAW INTEGRATION STREAMLINES STATE AGENCY WORKFLOW

EARLY PROLAW ADOPTER MAKES IMMEDIATE IMPACT

Founding Director Cliff Vanell established the Arizona Office of Administrative Hearings (AZOAH) in 1996 with a mission “to contribute to the quality of life in the state of Arizona by fairly and impartially hearing the contested matters of our fellow citizens arising out of state regulation.” For the legislature, that meant creating a centralized, independent body that holds hearings more efficiently and is more consumer friendly.

For Vanell, that meant modeling the department after highly professional, modern law offices. State agencies, like the Department of Insurance, were to be treated as clients; and Administrative Law Judges (ALJ) acted as lawyers and had to be responsible for creating their own work product. In addition, AZOAH must comply with statutory requirements for reporting and scheduling with limited staff and resources. It was obvious to Vanell that all of these needs required an automated system.

Comprehensive case management applications were a relatively new concept back in 1996, but with his previous experience as a solo practitioner, Vanell understood that this approach could reduce overhead costs. He researched several applications and found that ProLaw’s® sophisticated integration set it apart.

.....
“ProLaw has always offered cutting-edge technology to help us stay ahead of the curve. In fact, the single most important thing I could recommend to advance the administration of justice in any central panel is the adoption of ProLaw.”

Cliff Vanell
Director
Arizona Office of Administrative Hearings
.....

ProLaw provides a fully integrated practice and financial management solution that helps government agencies automate the practice of law and increase productivity.

“ProLaw instantly became the backbone of our agency. It enabled us to have the same efficiencies as a first-class law firm and it was very cost-effective. We can better serve state agencies and Arizona’s citizens with the most impartial and prompt hearings as possible,” says Vanell. “I have to say that ProLaw has never failed us.”

More than 6,500 cases are filed annually with the AZOAH by 40 state agencies, running the gamut from contractors accused of shoddy workmanship to water disputes. Due to budgetary swings, the agency has ranged from 19 ALJs and 15 support staff to nearly half that amount. When dealing with staff reductions ProLaw’s value is even greater, because the remaining staff rely more heavily on the system. Vanell is comfortable with this reliance on ProLaw because the system is constantly offering new features.

“ProLaw has always offered cutting-edge technology to help us stay ahead of the curve. In fact, the single most important thing I could recommend to advance the administration of justice in any central panel is the adoption of ProLaw. Not only does it have the ability to integrate all aspects of a court, but it provides valuable enhancements that are focused on streamlining the practice of law.”

FOSTERING TRUST THROUGH THE PORTAL

One example of how Vanell and his team are leveraging ProLaw’s enhancements is the AZOAH portal. Vanell has wholeheartedly embraced the portal functionality by making case information and documents available to the public. Anyone can search on matter ID, description, or state agency to view the status and dates of a case, and also download key documents like a hearing’s audio recording or decision document—all while maintaining confidentiality. Since the portal links directly with ProLaw’s database, users have access to the most up-to-date information about their case. “Everyone uses the portal.

ARIZONA OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

The independent state agency conducts hearings for other state agencies, boards and commissions by fairly and impartially hearing contested matters of citizens arising out of state regulation.

STRATEGIC GOALS

To operate the agency with the same efficiencies as a first-class law firm with an automated case management system.

WHY PROLAW?

ProLaw’s centralized database and fully integrated modules are geared for governmental legal agencies to more efficiently manage workflow.

RESULTS

- Drives the entire case management system with less overhead costs
- Public portal provides transparency while maintaining confidentiality
- Key performance reporting validates efficiencies and departmental bonuses

We've definitely reduced the number of calls regarding questions on individual cases because the self-serve portal contains comprehensive information," adds Vanell.

In fact, citizens often use the portal as a research database when preparing for their own case. The system provides total transparency of the process, which fosters trust between the citizens and the state.

"The fact that I've always been able to do exactly what I wanted to do in ProLaw is a testament to the flexibility of the system."

Cliff Vanell

UNDENIABLE EFFICIENCIES

When Vanell talks about how the agency uses ProLaw, he responds, "ProLaw is the Arizona Office of Administrative Hearings. The system is what drives the workflow through our agency." Every step—from a request for a hearing to the final decision—is recorded in ProLaw's central database and linked by matter ID. The integration with Microsoft® and Adobe® is key to enabling the staff to drag and drop files into ProLaw, including emails, attachments, PDFs, digital recordings and video, as well as saving documents to relevant matters without leaving Outlook™, Word™ or Adobe.

This functionality also enables AZOAH to maintain a paperless system. For example, records previously sent in paper form are now being transmitted electronically and managed by ProLaw. Furthermore, AZOAH is beginning eliminate inter-agency snail mail. Now that ProLaw can automatically convert Word documents to PDFs with the click of a button, consideration is being given to emailing decisions directly to the agency.

"One of the best features of ProLaw is that we are able to create efficiencies on the fly. We don't have to interrupt our current process to integrate new capabilities as we need them," says Vanell. "The fact that I've always been able to do exactly what I wanted to do in ProLaw is a testament to the flexibility of the system."

NEXT DOOR CLIENT SERVICE

Over the years, Vanell has relied on ProLaw's client services to help accomplish the agency's goals. For example, the agency had to migrate from Version 7 to Version 11 due to business continuity reasons. According to Vanell, as soon as it was known that the AZOAH needed support with this atypical upgrade, the ProLaw team responded immediately and guided the agency through a flawless migration. "I couldn't have asked for better support. I felt like the support team was right next door and we were their only client. That is the highest compliment I can make about ProLaw client service."

MAKING THE GRADE: TRACKING PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The AZOAH is subject to rigorous statutory timelines in order to expedite hearings and final agency actions. Because every docket event, phone call, document, time entry, and so forth resides in ProLaw, Vanell can easily track and report on key performance measures to the legislature, including the time it takes to set hearings, how many days between the request for hearing and the first hearing date, how many continuances have been requested, and how many days it takes to render decisions and transmit them to agencies for review. Since the AZOAH has used ProLaw since the beginning, they've been able to establish benchmark statistics and record their progress.

The staff also tracks all of their time in ProLaw, which enables the agency to accurately bill contracting agencies. These measurements are critical as they justify the agency's funding.

At the end of the fiscal year, Vanell and his team produce a detailed annual report with all mandatory data that is sent to the Governor, the Speaker of House, and the President of the Senate and posted on the AZOAH Web site for public access.

SPIRIT OF PROLAW

"ProLaw has been through many changes since we first implemented the system, but I am pleased that the company has maintained the same spirit of innovation," shares Vanell. "I had the best program and support I could ask for in 1996, and I still have the best program and support in 2009. I never fear that ProLaw will leave us behind."

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