



# DIGNITY IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Pro Bono Work Bolsters the  
Winston-Salem Community  
By Hannah Callaway





## THE PRO BONO PROJECT

has been a staple of the Wake Forest University School of Law for more than 15 years, encouraging students to engage the community through service to others. Unlike ad hoc pro bono opportunities at other law schools, Wake Forest Law offers a fully-realized program with a student-run board, faculty directors, and standing initiatives where students work under the supervision of licensed attorneys to serve a variety of unmet legal needs in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County. Last school year, students contributed an impressive combined 5,856 pro bono hours.

“The Pro Bono Project emphasizes that dignity is a human right,” says Mae Zeitouni (JD ’25), who recently completed a year as deputy director of the Project. Indeed, dignity is at the heart of this essential work, which focuses on supporting individuals from myriad backgrounds through the following projects:

- Expungements
- Wills
- Housing
- Know Your Rights
- Healthcare Advocacy
- Prison Letters
- Teen Court
- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)
- Funeral and Cemetery Law

This pro bono work addresses some of the most critical areas of need in the community, explains the Pro Bono Project's Faculty Advisor and Legal Aid attorney Corey Frost. "Attorneys in private practice have very limited ability to provide free legal services for people who need, for example, a simple will or a power of attorney document," he says. "This is where law students can help to fill the gap." For most projects, experienced student coordinators help train new students. Supervising attorneys are then on hand to review work and share feedback. In most instances, students work directly with clients.

Pro Bono Project clients have little to no barrier of entry to receive services, and intake events are strategically held in widely-accessible areas such as the Forsyth County Central Library. It's important to meet the community where they are, says former Pro Bono Project Executive Director Mary Catherine Baker (JD '25). "I've found there is sometimes a disconnect between law students and the general public," she says. "There's a lack of understanding about what the average person goes through. Most people cannot afford a lawyer; they don't have access to an attorney. We experience a level of privilege by attending law school, and it's good to redirect some of that back into the community." Zeitouni agrees. "Participating in the Pro Bono Project is encouragement to remind yourself why you're here and why you're doing this," she says. "Often, people come to intake events—not only because they want help, but because they need it. They're in a vulnerable place. It reminds me of the importance of community and that I can help to make a difference."

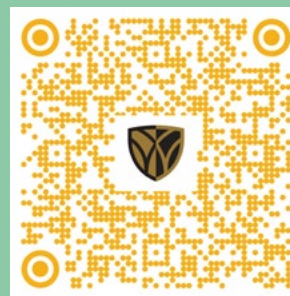
This deep appreciation for serving the community led Baker and Zeitouni to propose that students complete at least 10 pro bono hours during their 1L year, which was instituted during the 2024–2025 school year. The initiative has been successful, and has encouraged students to give even more of their time to local causes. This year, a record number of Wake Forest Law 1L students were named to the North Carolina Pro Bono Honor Society—which requires at least 50 pro bono hours logged in the span of a year. With 99% participation, 1L students together contributed nearly 3,000 pro bono hours of work throughout the year.

Mae Zeitouni (JD '25), left, and Mary Catherine Baker (JD '25)



Wake Forest Law alumni are encouraged to participate in the Pro Bono Project as supervising attorneys. Contact [probono@wfu.edu](mailto:probono@wfu.edu) for additional information.

Community members are invited to propose events for consideration. Scan the code to access the proposal form.



[wfu.law/PBForm](https://wfu.law/PBForm)





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—Corey Frost

However, one challenge is that interest is high and not every student can work with their first-choice project. Frost and the student-led board are intentionally creating more ways for students to become involved and are adding multiple opportunities throughout the year for project training. He also hopes to offer additional non-project-specific services in the future. “I want to be nimble,” he explains. “I’d like for the Pro Bono Project to be able to respond to things that arise when political winds change or when the legal landscape changes.” Last year, the Pro Bono Project organized a name change clinic. In the coming year, they’re considering a power of attorney clinic for undocumented immigrants who want to support their children in the event of a deportation. “The need is infinite,” Frost adds. “We’re only limited by initiative and by the availability of our students.”

Corey Frost, right of table, and Carson Leighty (JD '27), left of table, at the law student org fair in fall of 2025.







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—Mary Catherine Baker (JD '25)



A critical pillar of support for the local community, the Pro Bono Project also delivers substantial benefits for students. Projects provide a low pressure opportunity to explore unfamiliar areas of law. The work, in turn, includes real-world interviewing, counseling, and more. Many students, for example, do not have experience talking to members of a different community or a different socioeconomic status. “The way you speak in a law school class is very different from how you speak to clients,” Frost says. “These projects are a safe and controlled environment to gain that experience.” The work also introduces students, who come from all over the country, to the Winston-Salem community—the people, the culture, and the available resources.



“Working directly with so many people makes you view the world differently,” says Baker. “You have to confront many of your beliefs about the world, too. It’s a full range of human emotion.” She uses the alternative justice program Teen Court as an example of the dichotomies often found in pro bono work. “I experienced kids who were crying and scared alongside kids who were rough and trying to challenge me. Both need the same support and should be treated the same.” All individuals, regardless of background or circumstance, deserve the same access to legal and support services.



“Everyone benefits from pro bono work,” she continues. “I appreciate that Wake Forest Law makes this a lifelong learning opportunity. We engage with pro bono work, not so we can talk about it in a job interview or attract the right law firm, but because at the end of the day we have a desire to meet the need.”

Top: Corey Frost speaks at the Pro Bono Honor Society induction ceremony in April 2025. Second from top: honor society inductees pose after receiving their awards at the induction ceremony. Left to right, back row: Jane Claire Hendrick (JD '27), Katy Kerensky (JD '26), Mary Catherine Baker (JD '25), Carson Leighty (JD '27), Josh Horen (JD '27). Front row: Meghna Gohil (JD '26), Olivia Lara (JD '27), Vivian Bolen (JD '26), and Mae Zeitouni (JD '25). Second from bottom: Amelia McClure (JD '25), Melissa Stuckey (JD '26), Denise Hartsfield (JD '91), Libby Rau (JD '26), and Brielle Brown (JD '25). Bottom: Sydney Howard (JD '27).

# PRO BONO PROJECT SPOTLIGHTS



## HOUSING

The Housing Project began in Fall 2023, based on a proposal drafted by Mae Zeitouni (JD '25). In close partnership with Legal Aid of North Carolina, the project provides advice to low-income tenants who are navigating unsafe or unhealthy housing conditions across the state of North Carolina. Due to the high volume of referrals received, this collaboration is essential to ensure that as many individuals receive assistance as possible. Last school year, the project sponsored four intake events. Students held interviews, then advised tenants on communicating with their landlords regarding unsafe or unhealthy conditions. This work not only fulfills a community need, but also helps students to gain experience conducting client interviews.



## EXPUNGEMENTS

Working with the Wake Forest Law Innocence & Justice Clinic, students supporting the Expungements Project assist individuals in determining whether past convictions (including not guilty charges and juvenile, misdemeanor, and felony convictions) can be stricken from their records. It's a service in high demand. "The student coordinators worked hard to publicize an expungement intake event earlier this year," recalls Corey Frost, faculty advisor and Legal Aid attorney. Advertised on the radio, in print, and on social media, "the attendance exceeded my expectations with over 140 people showing up to have their records checked."



## FUNERAL & CEMETERY

Funeral and Cemetery Law, the newest Pro Bono Project, gives students the opportunity to conduct state-specific legal research on the handling of deceased persons and human remains. In partnership with the Wake Forest Department of Archaeology, students conduct title searches to help track the historic boundaries of the local Winston-Salem Odd Fellows Cemetery—a site that has been partially paved over and built on top of during the last 100 years. They also participate in hands-on, on-site work. "It's one of the most memorable projects for me," says Zeitouni of helping to plot and map the cemetery. "We talked to a woman who was so thankful because through the clean up efforts, she was able to trace one of her family members whom she hadn't previously been able to find."