

NYLAG NEWS

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In a Time of Great Need, NYLAG's Immigration Protection Unit Shows True Leadership

Over the summer, the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) entered into two extraordinary agreements to provide legal assistance to low-income immigrants. Through new agreements with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the New York Association for New Americans (NYANA), NYLAG's Immigrant Protection Unit (IPU) has committed to take on the cases of thousands of New York immigrants.

HIAS, the international migration agency of the American Jewish community, announced in July that it was closing its legal services division and shifting all local immigration services to NYLAG where individuals can receive free and direct legal services. HIAS will continue to provide services to those seeking asylum, a status awarded to individuals who already have entered the U.S. and fear persecution if sent back to their home countries.

Yisroel Schulman, President & Attorney-in-Charge of NYLAG, said: "Our new partnership with HIAS will strengthen both of our



NYLAG President Yisroel Schulman (center) signs agreement to transfer local New York City immigration cases from HIAS to NYLAG as IPU attorneys Irina Matiyachenko (far left) and Alla Kazakina (far right) and HIAS representative Alla Shagalova look on.

organizations to better fulfill our missions to provide high quality legal services to New York's immigration population."

NYANA, a non-profit that provided multi-layered relocation assistance, including legal services to recent immigrants in New York City, was forced to close its doors this month due to financial reasons. NYLAG has agreed to handle up to 4500 immigration cases transferred from NYANA.

NYANA was founded in 1949 in the aftermath of World War II to assist refugees to come to the United States. Over the years NYANA provided resettlement assistance to hundreds of thousands of refugees from

countless countries including the former Soviet Union, Cuba, Hungary, Romania, Tibet, Czechoslovakia, Iran, Syria, Uganda and China.

NYANA established its legal services program in 1991, offering a full array of immigration-related legal assistance such as representing immigrants in citizenship, residency, work authorization, family reunification and asylum proceedings. Mr. Schulman said, "NYANA has been an invaluable resource for New Americans over the last many years and NYLAG will strive to continue to provide their clients with crucial, high-quality legal services."

Irina Matiyachenko, Director of NYLAG's IPU, stated, "We are

NYLAG Launches Foreclosure Prevention Project

The NYLAG Board of Directors at its June meeting approved the launching of a Foreclosure Prevention Project. The Project's goal is to help individual homeowners save their homes from foreclosure, preserve their lifelines, prevent deed theft and fraud, and provide a place for tenants in multi-family dwellings. The new Project is receiving support from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal with a two-year, \$475,000 grant.

The establishment of this new Project represents NYLAG's response to both the looming foreclosure crisis in New York City and the dearth of lawyers offering free legal services to low-income borrowers. NYLAG has a strong record in representing low-income families facing foreclosure and, through the Project, will expand its services by providing legal representation and court-based services to bor-

rowers with subprime and unconventional mortgages facing foreclosure. The Project also will include outreach, community education, and financial counseling. NYLAG expects to help over 1,000 low-income homeowners over the next two years to help them avoid foreclosure now and in the future. NYLAG will retain two additional lawyers and a paralegal to staff the Project.

NYLAG will collaborate with four agencies that have extensive experience in housing counseling and that together cover the most affected communities citywide: Neighborhood Housing Services of Jamaica, Council of Jewish Community Organizations of Flatbush, West Bronx Housing and Neighborhood Resource Center, and New York Mortgage Coalition. Those areas that will receive priority will be hard-hit areas in Southeast Queens, South Central and

East Brooklyn, Western Bronx, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and areas of Long Island.

In New York City, homeownership began to climb this decade relative to rental rates due to the increase in subprime loans made to low-income, minority borrowers who already pay more than half of their income on housing costs. The rate of subprime and high cost loans reached over 50% of all mortgage loans in some working class neighborhoods dominated by African Americans and Latinos.

Among the 10 New York community districts with the highest rates of subprime lending, seven are among those with the highest rates of foreclosure. In New York, more than 20% of subprime mortgages originated in 2005 will end in foreclosure, a loss of an estimated 29,000

homes.

In neighborhoods that are heavily low-income/working class and minority and red-lined by traditional banking institutions, the problem is critical. By preventing future bad mortgage decisions, NYLAG and its collaborators will help to prevent destroyed credit ratings and a permanent descent into renter status or even homelessness. On a larger scale, the Project will help to halt a decline in property values in the neighborhood, the transfer of neighborhood wealth to outside investors, the decline in affordable housing stock, the loss of a sense of community due to high turnover among long-time residents, and a potential increase in crime.

For more information about the Foreclosure Prevention Project, contact Randal Jeffrey, Esq. at RJeffrey@nylag.org

IPU Takes on New Immigration Cases

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anxious to use our expertise to help those in need, and will continue to ensure that current and reliable information on changing immigration law is widely distributed to the client population and those professionals that serve them." In 2007, NYLAG provided legal assistance to over 10,400 immigrants on such matters as completing citizenship and legal permanent residency applications and advocating for public benefits (such as food stamps, Medicaid, SSI, and home care) to secure basic life-sustaining needs and a decent standard of living.

For further information about NYLAG's Immigration Protection Unit, contact Irina Matiychenko at IMatiychenko@nylag.org.

2008 State Bar Partnership Conference Participants

You are cordially invited to a
NYLAG-sponsored Conference Blast.

• Music • Dancing • Drinks

Date: September 23rd

Time: 9 p.m.—midnight

Location: Albany Marriott

189 Wolf Road, Albany, NY 12205

NYLAG Wins Victory for Immigrant New Yorkers Seeking U.S. Citizenship

On July 8, Judge Edward R. Korman of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York approved a groundbreaking settlement of *Yakubova v. Chertoff*, a case brought by NYLAG's Special Litigation Unit (SLU) on behalf of immigrants challenging pervasive delays in the processing of naturalization applications by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Many of the immigrants who will benefit from this settlement have been waiting years for a decision on their naturalization applications. "The most common concern that our clients expressed was fear that they would not be able to vote in the presi-

dential election this November. Now, that fear can be put to rest," said SLU attorney Deborah Berkman.

Under the settlement agreement, USCIS must adjudicate approximately 90% of the naturalization applications of the 1,426 individuals residing in Kings, Nassau, Queens, Richmond, and Suffolk counties who as of June 12, 2008 had been waiting more than 120 days after their citizenship interviews for decisions on their applications. These applications must be adjudicated by the end of August 2008, and successful applicants must be given the oath of citizenship in time to register to vote in the November election.

NYLAG brought this suit in 2006 after learning from its clients that naturalization backlogs were causing serious harm to thousands of New York City immigrants. While waiting for decisions on their applications, would-be citizens could not vote, they could not sponsor immediate relatives for visas, they could not receive certain life-sustaining federal benefits, and they were ineligible for numerous types of jobs. As a result of the court-ordered settlement in *Yakubova*, those eligible for naturalization will soon be granted all the benefits of citizenship.

Muhammad Shabbir Sajid,

one of the plaintiffs, recently became a citizen after waiting for a decision on his naturalization application for almost three years. "I am so proud to be a citizen of the United States! I registered to vote the day I was sworn in and am thrilled that I can take part in November's presidential election. I finally feel like I am a full part of American society and I know my vote can bring about great change."

For more information on *Yakubova v. Chertoff*, or the Special Litigation Unit, contact Jason Parkin jparkin@nylag.org.

DVCC Celebrates its 10th Anniversary by Raising Funds to Serve Victims of Domestic Violence

On June 12th, NYLAG's Domestic Violence Clinical Center (DVCC) celebrated its 10th Anniversary at the A.I.R. Gallery in New York City. Speaking to over 200 guests, Kim Susser, Director of the Matrimonial and Family Law Unit at NYLAG and the driving force behind DVCC, opened the evening's program. She said, "The DVCC has been able to alleviate much of the physical and emotional burden faced by victims and their families. The passion, knowledge and dedication of DVCC students are invaluable. By endowing them with substantive experience, the DVCC will continue to empower new lawyers with the skills needed to help victims break free from domestic violence."

Created in 1998, the Domestic Violence Clinical Center (DVCC) uses the power of the law to help women combat domestic violence. It operates as a collaborative project be-



From left to right, Family Law Unit staff: Christina Brandt-Young, Kira Schettino, Elana Bildner, Janice Diaz, Lisa Rivera, Kirsten Brodsky, Amy Hozer, Kim Susser

tween NYLAG and area law schools, offering a year-long externship for second and third-year law students to learn the skills necessary to represent battered women in Family Court.

Under a Student Practice Order that allows them to practice under the supervision of NYLAG attorneys, DVCC students litigate family offense and domestic violence-related visitation and custody cases, handling matters from initial client consultations to court hearings. In addition, the students learn from practicing NYLAG attorneys about family, immigration and criminal law matters related to domestic violence. By providing the opportunity to both learn and litigate, the Clinic simultaneously bolsters

NYLAG's capacity to serve clients with domestic violence issues and provides students with valuable public interest law experience.

The DVCC was launched ten years ago with the generous support of the late Marty Silverman, whose memory was honored at the 10th Anniversary celebration. Yisroel Schulman, NYLAG's President & Attorney-in-Charge, presented a plaque to the Silverman Charitable Group noting that the DVCC is continuously inspired by Mr. Silverman's ever present spirit. Mr. Schulman said that the DVCC staff and volunteer's embrace Mr. Silverman's spirit of service as well as one of his favorite mantras, "We are not

through until we are through."

NYLAG is grateful to all the guests who supported DVCC through the 10th Anniversary Celebration and we especially want to recognize the event's major sponsors: Cleary Gottlieb, O'Melveny & Myers LLP, CBS Corporation, St. John's University School of Law, Dorsey & Whitney LLP, Alston + Bird LLP, and Abby S. Milstein, Esq.

For more information about the Domestic Violence Clinical Center, contact Lisa Rivera, Esq., at lrivera@nylag.org



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Student Interns Give and Receive at NYLAG

NYLAG's staff grew substantially this summer, with the addition of 35 student interns working full-time for ten weeks from late-May to early-August. Students came from law schools in the New York area and beyond, including Brooklyn, Cardozo, UC Berkeley, CUNY, Harvard, Michigan, NYU, New York Law, Pace, Penn, St. John's and Yale. Five undergraduate students from Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Penn, Princeton and Vassar also volunteered for the summer.

Each student was assigned an attorney to act as a supervisor and mentor. After an orientation, students spent their time meeting with clients, conducting research, participating in legal clinics, going to court, and drafting correspondence, petitions, motions, and other legal

documents. Some interns also engaged in oral advocacy at administrative hearings, helping clients appeal denials of public assistance, food stamps or Social Security benefits.

Kyle Dandelet, a law student from Penn who interned with the Special Litigation Unit said, "I sharpened my research, writing, and advocacy skills, and developed a more sophisticated understanding of legal procedure. I also became passionate about the issues NYLAG undertakes, serving to reaffirm my commitment to a career in public interest."

NYLAG's summer program also included a 26-session training series designed to introduce students to poverty law, covering topics such as representing victims of domestic vio-

lence in Family Offense proceedings and child custody cases; handling landlord/tenant disputes in housing court; and helping clients obtain Social Security, public assistance, and public health insurance benefits.

A panel of NYLAG attorneys also conducted a session on ethical issues that can arise in civil legal services work. In addition, staff attorneys held brown bag lunches to discuss the clerkship and fellowship application process, as well as how to incorporate pro bono work into private practice, which was led by NYLAG Board Member Scott Musoff of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP. The interns and staff also enjoyed spending time together at several social events, including happy hours, a Brooklyn Cyclones baseball

game, and an afternoon picnic in Central Park.

Margo Hoppin, a law student from NYU who interned with LegalHealth said, "I came in knowing very little, and left feeling effective and useful when working with a client. Everyone I worked with was always willing to help, supervise and include me in their cases. I couldn't have asked for a more stimulating or friendly environment in which to start learning how to be a lawyer."

NYLAG also wishes to thank the law firms of McKee Nelson LLP, Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP, Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP, and White & Case LLP, who sent summer associates to spend a portion of their summer volunteering in our office.



NYLAG Seeks Volunteers and Pro bono Attorneys

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