

Educating Pro Se Litigants in Oregon

Pro Bono
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Foster Garvey Newsroom

Contact

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A hallmark of Foster Garvey's Pro Bono program is finding opportunities to help people who would not normally have access to representation. Through the Free Federal Law Clinic, a new program run by the Oregon Chapter of the Federal Bar Association, lawyers have an opportunity to volunteer to meet for 30 minutes with pro se litigants to advise them on courtroom procedures, including how to file documents and manage their litigation, as well as to answer any questions they have about the process. The federal court provides malpractice coverage, a meeting space in Portland's Mark O. Hatfield U.S. Courthouse, engagement letters and notice ahead of time to run conflict checks with the volunteer attorney's law firm. Not only does this program help connect people in need with sought-after legal resources, the Court has made the process of providing and accessing pro bono counsel seamless for both attorneys and litigants.

In one example, Foster Garvey attorney Kathleen Bricken helped a pro se litigant who already had a pending lawsuit against a police department but needed help amending his complaint to overcome a Rule 12 motion to dismiss the case. Kathleen directed the *pro se* litigant to a previous case involving another police department as a guide, and provided him advice based on her research regarding his constitutional claims and issues of immunity. This helped her *pro se* client limit and focus his complaint on the claim that had the highest likelihood of success – a First Amendment free speech claim. Our client was grateful for the assistance, which is critical to instilling in disaffected *pro se* litigants a respect for the system and a feeling of more equitable access to justice, rather than frustration or hopelessness.