How to Start or Expand Your ‘Low Bono’ Legal Practice by Joining the DC Refers Panel of Attorneys and Mediators

Jenny Lyman and Charlie Lemley

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The Justice Gap

A 2017 study found that 86% of the legal needs of poor and low-income citizens received inadequate or no attention

The most common legal problems they face include employment, housing, consumer debt, insurance, family matters, etc.

Federally funded legal services are limited to people and families at or below 125% of the federal poverty limit (in 2020, $15,950 for individuals and $32,750 for a family of four)

Some organizations offer free services to people with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty limit

Individuals between 200% and 400% generally have the same needs and inability to pay full lawyer rates, but no free assistance

The “Low Bono” Solution

- Massive unmet need for legal services among clients who cannot afford to pay full rates
- And roughly three quarters of lawyers work in firms of 5 or fewer lawyers
  - Generally cannot afford to devote extended time to matters that generate no income
- The Legal Services Corporation and others have recognized that offering services at reduced rates may permit these lawyers to provide a valuable service without sacrificing their practice

Low Bono = Pro Bono

- ABA Model Rule of Professional Conduct 6.1 recognizes “delivery of legal services at no fee or substantially reduced fee to individuals” as pro bono service
- But the ABA encourages lawyers first to satisfy their pro bono obligation, if possible, by providing free services
- DC Rule of Professional Conduct 6.1 likewise defines pro bono to include offering services at a substantially reduced fee, but without the caveat that lawyers should focus first on traditional pro bono
- Thus, solo practitioners and lawyers in small firms can satisfy their ethical obligation to provide pro bono service by offering services at substantially reduced rates – but how?

DC Refers

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Washington, DC

Find an Affordable Lawyer

Qualified attorneys who're willing to represent modest-means clients at below-market rates.

Find a lawyer ⟶

How to Search

Learn how to use the DC Refers directory to find the right lawyer.

Learn more

Other Resources

Find alternative, lower-cost or free legal help in DC.

Learn more

Join our Directory

Apply to join the DC Refers directory.

Learn more

DC Refers provides an online directory of lawyers willing to provide high-quality legal services at reduced rates for clients of modest means.

Poverty Guidelines, 48 Contiguous States

2022 Annual

Household/ Family Size	100%	200%	400%
1	$13,590	$27,180	$54,360
2	$18,310	$36,620	$73,240
3	$23,030	$46,060	$92,120
4	$27,750	$55,500	$111,000
5	$32,470	$64,940	$129,880
6	$37,190	$74,380	$148,760
7	$41,910	$83,820	$167,640
8	$46,630	$93,260	$186,520

* For families/households with more than 8 persons, add $4,720

2022 Monthly

Household/ Family Size	100%	200%	400%
1	$1,133	$2,265	$4,530
2	$1,526	$3,052	$6,103
3	$1,919	$3,838	$7,677
4	$2,313	$4,625	$9,250
5	$2,706	$5,412	$10,823
6	$3,099	$6,198	$12,397
7	$3,493	$6,985	$13,970
8	$3,886	$7,772	$15,543

Practice areas

Family

- Child support / Child custody
- Guardianship
- Divorce

Immigration

- Citizenship
- Deportation
- Family-based visas

Estates, Wills, & Elder

- Wills & trusts
- Guardianship
- Power of attorney

Business

- Contracts
- Business formation
- Disputes

Criminal & Traffic

- Felony/Misdemeanor
- DUI/DWI
- Traffic violations

Consumer Protection & Debt

- Credit report issue
- Unfair banking practices
- Identity theft

Employment

- Contesting non-competes
- Wage theft / Unpaid benefits
- Workplace discrimination

Landlord/Tenant

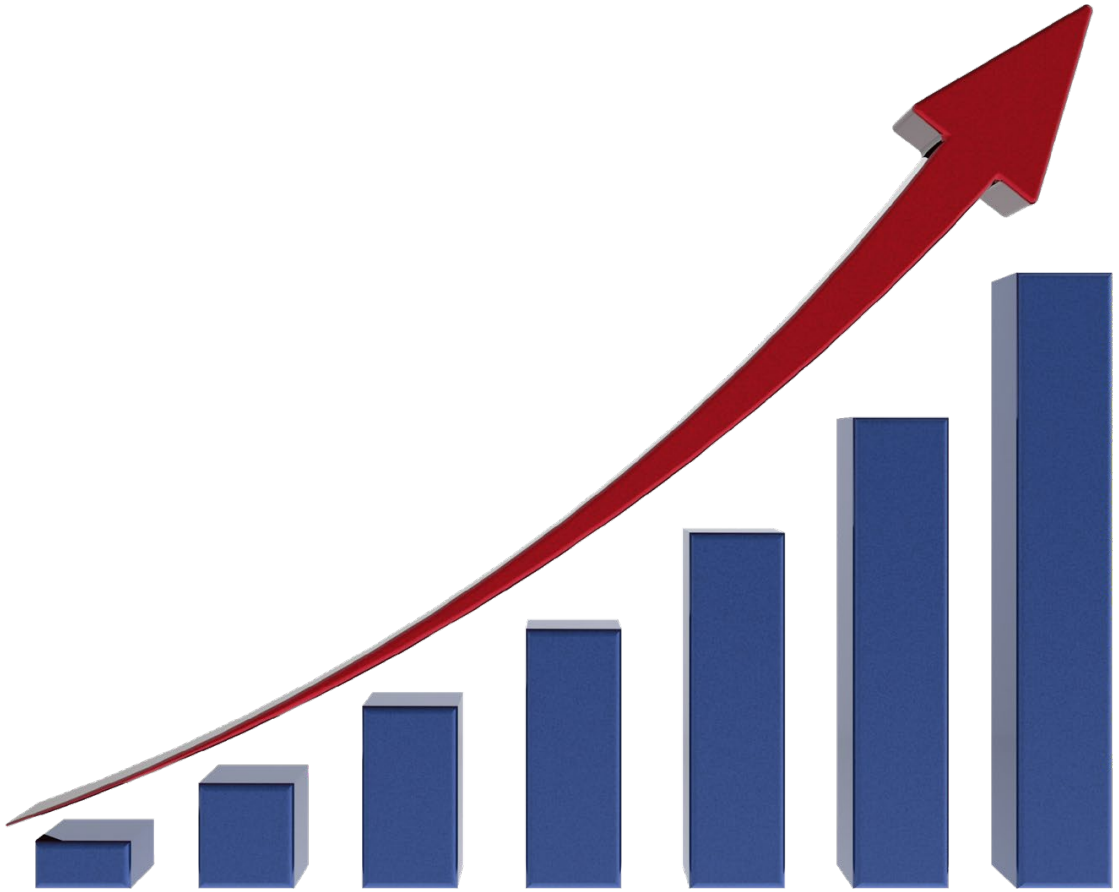
- Evictions
- Tenant help
- Landlord help

And More

- Tax law
- Civil rights law
- Insurance law

Find a lawyer ⟶

Since our founding in 2017, DC Refers has placed 284 cases, provided brief advice to 1072 people & received 2,364 requests for assistance.



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DC Refers by the Numbers

In the past 12 months

696 requests

for legal assistance

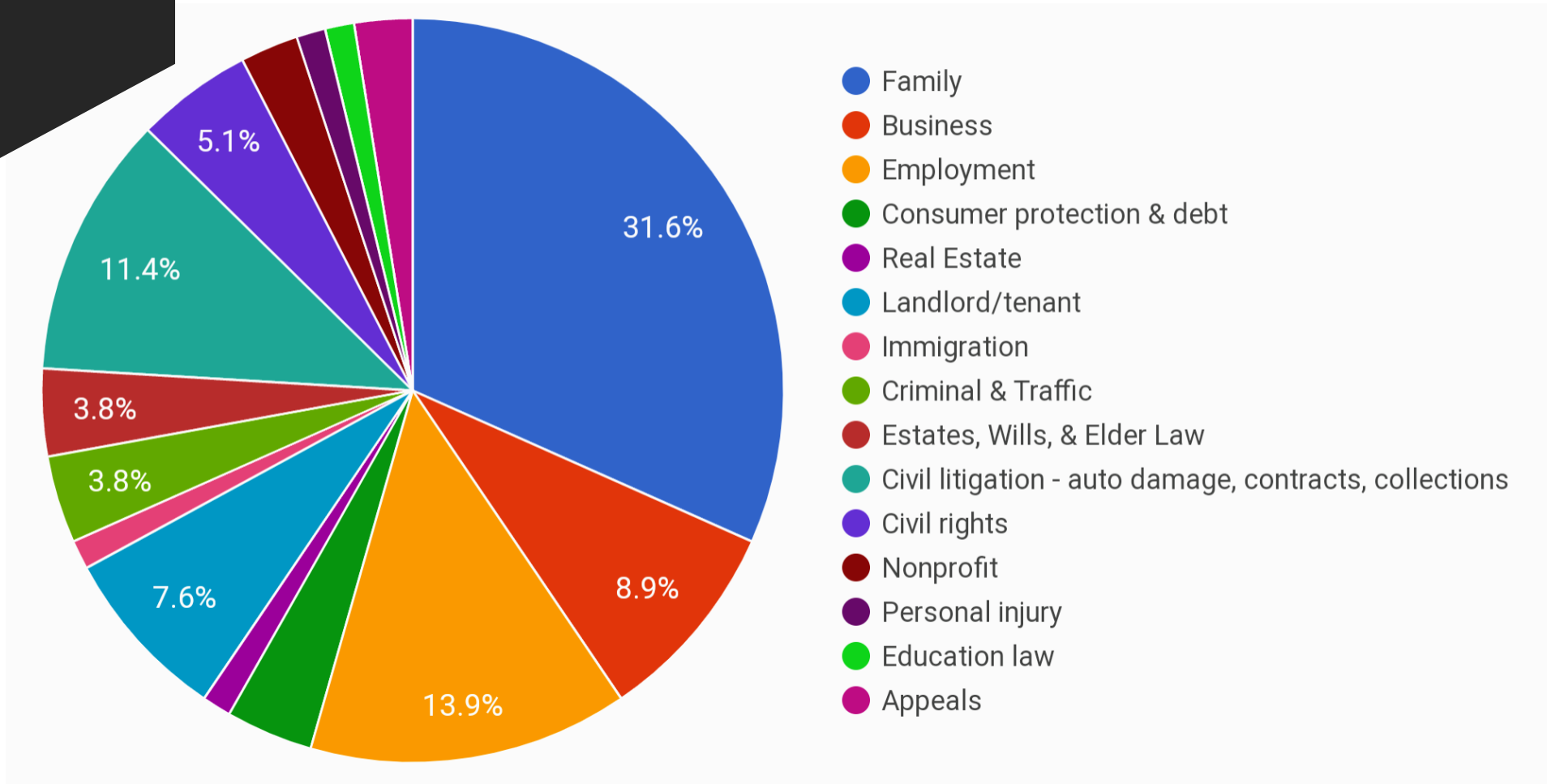
303

brief advice/
consultations

60

retained engagements

Most Common Practice Areas Requested Over the Last Three Months



How do clients find the DC Refers directory?

- Court Resource Centers and the Family Court Self-Help Center
- Legal Services Providers
- Community Organizations (churches, rec centers, schools)
- Social Media & Online Searches
- Referrals!

Interested in Joining One of Our Panels?

Mediators in our directory must:

Have at least 40 hours of mediation training

Have at least two years of relevant experience in each specific practice area for which they are listed, and

Agree to provide services at our below $75 per hour/per party with a 2 hour session minimum

Agree to abide by our Mediator Guidelines

Submit an online application available on our website https://dcrefers.org

*The application includes a $50 fee and both professional and client references which are checked by DC Refers.

Lawyers in our directory must:

Be members in good standing of the D.C. Bar, or the appropriate federal forum

Maintain malpractice insurance

Have at least two years of relevant experience in DC in each specific practice area for which they are listed

Agree to provides services for a reduced fee of between $75-$150 per hour

Agree to abide by our Mediator Guidelines

Submit an online application available on our website https://dcrefers.org

8The application includes a $50 fee and both professional and client references which are checked by DC Refers.

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Step 1 of 8

Where do you need a lawyer?

Location

20001

Enter a zip code, neighborhood, or city

Continue

Do you want to see if you qualify for reduced fees?

Some lawyers charge reduced rates depending on your income bracket. Your income bracket is based on your household size and monthly income.

Yes, I want to see if I qualify

Skip

← BACK Step 3 of 8

What do you need help with?

- Family
- Business
- Consumer protection & debt
- Estates, Wills, & Elder Law
- Real estate
- Landlord/tenant
- Immigration
- Criminal & Traffic
- More...

Right now our directory only has lawyers who work on the types of matters listed above. For other issues, you can search on LRSConnect and LawHelp.

Can you tell us more about your issue?

Adoption
You want help moving parental rights over a child to new parents.

Select

Adult Guardianship
You want help appointing someone to manage the care, property, and finances of an adult who can't take care of themselves anymore.

Select

Alimony/Spousal Support
You want help determining what financial support one ex-spouse needs to provide the other.

Select

Annulment
You want help ending a marriage that was not legitimate in the first place because of fraud, deceit, misunderstanding, or another issue.

Select

Child Custody
You want help establishing who has the right to care for and make important decisions about a child.

Select

Child Guardianship
You want help appointing someone to manage the care, property, and finances of a child.

Select

Child Support
You have an issue involving the financial support that a parent may owe to a child.

Contested Divorce
You and your spouse want to end your marriage.

Domestic Violence/Civil Order of Protection
You want protection from a person who is harrassing, threatening, abusing, or intimidating you.

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Step 5 of 8

Do you have any court appearances or other deadlines coming up?

Yes

No

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Step 6 of 8

Briefly describe your legal issue.

Tell the attorney about your legal issue (for example, your goals or the problem you hope to solve). Please do not provide any sensitive or confidential information here -- those details should only be discussed during your consultation with the attorney.

0/250

Next

Skip

Sonali Khadilkar

1934 Old Gallows Road, Suite 350, Vienna, Virginia, 22182

Khadilkar Law practices in family law, including divorce, custody, child support, domestic violence, and neglect. I have devoted my practice to individuals facing intense personal decisions - those surrounding their family. Khadilkar Law offers quality legal representation with personal attention to each case. I welcome the opportunity to get to know you, your case, and your family.

Experience	Languages	Law Firm
DC since 2003	English	Khadilkar Law PLLC

Select

Requesting a consultation does not create an attorney-client relationship.

Sebastian Krop

1330 New Hampshire, Suite 111, Washington, District of Columbia, 20036

Mr. Krop has broad experience drafting appeals, waivers, court motions and briefs, and represents clients at USCIS interviews and in immigration court proceedings. Mr. Krop also represents clients in all aspects of family law including custody and visitation, divorce, division of marital property, spousal and child support and domestic violence matters. Krop works together with his clients to resolve their family law matters through negotiation, mediation, collaborative law and, when necessary, litigation.

Experience	Languages	Law Firm
DC since 2007	English, Polish	Law Office of Sebastian Krop

Select

Requesting a consultation does not create an attorney-client relationship.

Jenny Brody

5101 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Ste. 305, Washington, District of Columbia, 20016

I provide individualized representation to clients in a wide range of family law matters, including: divorce, child custody and support, alimony; adoption; domestic violence; stalking/harassment; Civil Protection Orders; technology abuse, and applications for Special Juvenile Immigrant Status (SIJS). I strive in each case to achieve my clients' goals, whether through a negotiated agreement or through litigation. I previously served as a co-founder and co-executive Director of the DC Volunteer Lawyers Project, an organization providing legal services to domestic violence survivors; and also...More

Experience	Languages	Law Firm
DC since 1985	English	Brody Kling LLC

Select

Requesting a consultation does not create an attorney-client relationship.

What’s next?

More Lawyers and Mediators
On Our Panel

More Clients
Visiting Our Website

Connect with DC Refers

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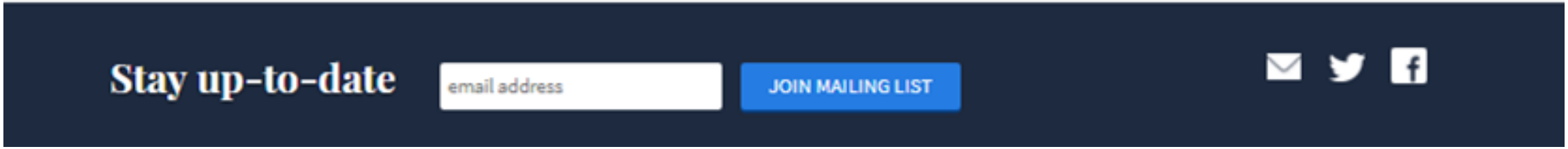

Questions?
Ideas?
Suggestions?