

# The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel®

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## *Pro Bono – Law Firms*

### Destined To Be Pro Bono Partner: My Dream Job

*The Editor interviews Laura Tuell Parcher, Partner, Jones Day.*

**Editor:** You have just been appointed Jones Day's first full-time Pro Bono Partner in charge of firmwide Pro Bono. How has your firm's pro bono practice been handled historically? Please tell our readers why at this point in time the firm needed someone in this post.

**Parcher:** Historically, we've had a firmwide partner in charge of pro bono, as well as a partner in charge of pro bono in most of the offices. None of those lawyers held those positions full-time; they all maintained their own billable practices. Beginning last January, our Managing Partner, Steve Brogan, asked me to take over as the first-ever full-time firmwide partner in charge of pro bono. There are still partners in charge of pro bono in every office, both domestically and internationally. They handle their pro bono responsibilities part-time while continuing their own practices. I organize the firmwide effort on a full-time basis.

The reason that the firm decided to set up this position is a genuine desire to grow pro bono internationally and domestically. The firm has a strong concept of one firm worldwide and the offices work very closely together on a number of matters, but we had not fully appreciated and utilized the value of that worldwide effort on the pro bono front. Looking at it, we recognized that in order to really grow and build that practice, we would need to dedicate additional resources.

**Editor:** How do you plan to implement the firm's worldwide effort?

**Parcher:** Initially, I have focused on putting in place some administrative tools that facilitate growing pro bono in the offices including mainstreaming some of the administrative tasks.

I have also begun a tour of the offices to communicate the mission and vision of the firm to make sure that everyone understands the commitment of the firm to growing and building pro bono. In order to identify opportunities that might be of interest to the various offices, I have spent a fair amount of time researching potential new projects and reaching out to organizations, some of whom we've worked with before and others that are new partners for us, and I have also facilitated staffing those projects, many of which we're staffing in multiple offices across the firm.



Laura Tuell  
Parcher

**Editor:** How do you plan to tailor the various pro bono projects to the interests of lawyers in your vast number of overseas offices as well as to the interests of attorneys in the U.S.?

**Parcher:** I have begun visiting the different offices and meeting more frequently with the partners in charge of pro bono in those offices, the partners in charge of the offices themselves and other key players in those offices. I am learning the strengths of the different offices and what the individual lawyers' interests are, and I've been working to tailor projects based on those strengths and interests.

**Editor:** You're using pro bono organizations to a great extent?

**Parcher:** Yes, in my experience using non-profit organizations to identify and screen cases for us is incredibly helpful. Typically, they have more experience and knowledge in this area than we do, and they can provide us better insight into the strengths and weak-

nesses of the cases and the resources, time and expenses it will take to handle the matter. Also, they can mentor us along the way. So, we almost exclusively take cases through nonprofit organizations.

**Editor:** Do you feel that your international experience will be of value in working closely with overseas offices?

**Parcher:** I do. I have had a fair amount of international experience; I have undertaken a couple of international arbitrations, I have worked on a significant international smuggling case and an international bank fraud case. These cases gave me the opportunity to work with lawyers in our international as well as domestic offices. However, the firm's concept of one firm worldwide means that there is a collegial community among all the offices such that I don't think that working with the international offices is functionally different from working with the domestic offices in terms of working with the lawyers and staffing cases. The more interesting part is learning the culture of the different countries in which we have offices which varies a great deal in terms of the nature of the pro bono work that they can undertake.

For instance, our pro bono work in Asia is quite different. For example, several of our lawyers in Taipei teach at local schools for free. We've also done some corporate work for non profit organizations that are dedicated to social causes.

**Editor:** How will you measure effectiveness?

**Parcher:** I think over the course of time we will be looking at different ways to measure it. One way will be to look at the number of cases, the diversity of cases, and the number of lawyers and offices participating. I'm very pleased that our office in Moscow just took their first pro bono case.

*Please email the interviewee at [lparcher@jonesday](mailto:lparcher@jonesday) with questions about this interview.*

**Editor: I understand that one of your goals is to develop opportunities to advance the rule of law and to make a global difference in the areas of affordable, decent housing and access to education. How do you foresee this happening?**

**Parcher:** We've already begun work in all three of those areas this year. On the rule of law front, Jones Day has become one of the executive committee members of the Public-Private Partnership for Reform in Afghanistan. This is a partnership between the State Department, some law firms, some members of the judiciary, and a few law schools to provide assistance to prosecutors, defense lawyers and judges in Afghanistan on legal issues, the rule of law, practical issues such as litigation skill building as well as providing resources for purchasing supplies.

The first training opportunity was just this past month, and one of our new lawyers in the Washington Office, Judge Walter Kelley, was one of the instructors that taught prosecutors from Afghanistan trial advocacy skills. That project is our first step into the rule of law area.

The housing area has been explosive this year; the Washington Office began an affordable housing project where we have undertaken six representations of tenants living in buildings that have deplorable housing code violations. In fact, just last week we won a preliminary injunction in one of those cases requiring the landlord to make significant repairs to the building.

The Cleveland Office and the L.A. Office have also both very recently started projects assisting people who are in eviction proceedings to keep their homes. They have had significant wins both in Cleveland and in L.A.

On the education front, we have had a traditional commitment which we hope to grow. One of the stars of that initiative is a woman named Evelyne Friedel, an attorney in our Paris Office. She is going to become president of Autism Europe next year after waging a long battle with the government in France to require appropriate special education for children with autism and other special needs. She has spent a lot of her professional time working on that issue throughout Europe. Both the Washington Office and the Atlanta Office have undertaken individual representation for children with special needs in an effort to secure them access to special education.

We also just started the Junior J.D. program this year in Houston where several of our lawyers are working with eighth grade students there to teach them about the law and legal issues and also act as mentors to the students. We have a similar mentoring

program in Cleveland. So, all of those projects are off and running and we're excited and looking for new opportunities.

**Editor: You were also recently acclaimed DC Bar Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year. Please describe the various subject areas of pro bono work that have interested you the most.**

**Parcher:** I've been fortunate at Jones Day to spend a lot of my career doing a variety of pro bono cases; I've done housing discrimination, death penalty work, voting rights work and work in a variety of other areas, but the area that I'm most personally passionate about is immigration and asylum. The asylum cases have been some of the most rewarding matters that I've done.

**Editor: You were a founder of the Free Legal Advice and Referral Clinic. What prompted you to become involved with this charity?**

**Parcher:** A little over ten years ago there were significant budgetary cuts in legal aid for indigent residents of DC. The DC Bar looked closely into how to address that need and conceived of this advice and referral clinic as a way to alleviate the problem. The Bar asked Jones Day if we would partner with them to begin the first clinic. I was fortunate enough to be asked to participate. One of my partners who is now in China, Peter Wang, and I led Jones Day's effort.

The clinic has been incredibly successful, meeting the second Saturday of every month. We used to staff it every time it met, but now we staff it four times a year. They've started a second clinic at another location. Both clinics often assist 50-75 customers on a Saturday morning and provide on-the-spot brief advice to them, helping them deal with a variety of issues including landlord-tenant, immigration, probate, wills, tax, and bankruptcy.

**Editor: You've also been active with the Capital Area Immigrants Rights Coalition and Bread for the City. What type of work is conducted by these organizations?**

**Parcher:** The Capital Area Immigrants Rights Coalition, is a coalition of immigration-related organizations in the Metropolitan DC Area. CAIR Coalition focuses its direct services on representing detained immigrants. There are very few resources for detained immigrants in the area. Staff and volunteers visit the different detention facilities across Virginia, identify people who have cases that need lawyers and try to place them. Jones Day takes a number of cases every year.

Bread for the City is a very different organization. It's a large nonprofit here in DC that provides legal assistance, but it also provides free medical care, free food, social services and other related services to low-income residents in the District. Jones Day has been very involved with that organization for years including the large program where individual Jones Day employees make contributions and the firm matches them to provide meals during the holidays for families across the District.

**Editor: Could you describe one of the immigration or death penalty issues with which you have been involved which you would rank among your most personally fulfilling?**

**Parcher:** The most personally fulfilling case I have undertaken was on behalf of a woman from Africa who had suffered female genital mutilation and had been forced into a marriage, raped repeatedly by her husband and had been beaten and persecuted a great deal in her home country. She fled to the U.S. pregnant with a child, and we were fortunate to have the opportunity to represent her. She was granted asylum and is now going to school, working and doing very well.

Her story for me was personally very fulfilling because she fought very hard in her home country to educate other women about female genital mutilation and all of the reasons why they should have a right not to submit to this indignity. I was inspired by her passion for women's rights and her willingness to stand up and fight for those issues despite all of the persecution she was facing from her family and the state.

**Editor: Describe why you are so dedicated to pro bono service.**

**Parcher:** I went to law school in part inspired with a desire to use my legal education to help others. I always joked that I went to law school to save the world. At Jones Day the work that I have done for paying clients has been very fulfilling, but my heart is in pro bono work.

It is really an amazing and empowering experience to use my education to make a difference in other people's lives. My education is a gift that I love to share with other people. It gives them something they cannot do for themselves when they often have nowhere else to turn. In some instances, it might save people's lives and in other instances it makes their lives better. It is a really wonderful thing to be able to give back to the community in which we live and practice and to be able to make a difference. I have my dream job.