

Chief Judge David Recognizes the Exemplary Work of *Pro Se* Project Volunteers

In his State of the District address, The Honorable Michael J. Davis, Chief U.S. District Judge, recognized volunteer attorneys and law firms who have enthusiastically participated in the *Pro Se* Project over the past year and presented them with awards. The recipients of the 2011 Distinguished Pro Bono Service awards are:



David L. Shulman
Law Office of David L. Shulman, PLLC

The Law Office of David L. Shulman is a two-person firm. Despite its small size, David Shulman has accepted four *Pro Se* Project cases. He has participated in three settlement conferences on behalf of *Pro Se* Project plaintiffs and successfully negotiated a resolution in two of the cases. According to the Honorable Jeffrey J. Keyes, Shulman handled a difficult plaintiff in a challenging situation “beautifully.” Shulman and his associate, Craig Buske, have provided valuable assistance to *Pro Se* Project litigants and to the Court and have expressed their willingness to continue to do their part to make justice more accessible.

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Fay E. Fishman
Peterson & Fishman, PLLP

Approximately one-quarter of the cases the Court refers to the *Pro Se* Project are Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) appeals.

Fay Fishman, who is also a member of a two-person firm, has been a tremendous help to the *Pro Se* Project in representing SSDI appellants, analyzing *Pro Se* Project SSDI matters, and preparing memos for other volunteer attorneys willing to accept SSDI referrals. When Fishman presents locally at CLEs on SSDI appeals, she promotes the *Pro Se* Project and works to recruit new volunteers. Fishman gives her time to answer questions of any volunteer attorney on SSDI matters and willingly shares her briefs and any other information she can to assist in their representation of the disabled.

Sara J. Payne
Gustafson Gluek PLLC

Sara Payne worked with Dan Gustafson on a case Judge Susan Richard Nelson referred to the *Pro Se* Project for the settlement of the *pro se* litigant’s only claim to sur-



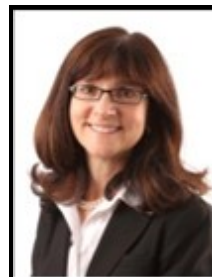
vive summary judgment – the lack of halal meals in prison. As a result of Payne’s involvement, the parties reached a settlement in which the Department of Corrections (DOC) agreed to make halal-certified food available at the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Stillwater during all regularly scheduled meals. The DOC will conduct annual inspections or audits of DOC’s meals, as well as the food-preparation process. Halal-certified items will be clearly designated in writing and made available to all inmates. The settlement of this case will allow Minnesota’s Muslim inmates to more freely exercise their religious beliefs, and it has far-reaching First Amendment implications.



Marlene Garvis
and
Joseph Flynn
Jardine, Logan & O’Brien, PLLP



Marlene Garvis and Joseph Flynn are co-*pro bono* coordinators at Jardine, Logan & O’Brien and are committed to the *Pro Se* Project and *pro bono* work. Garvis has entered notices of appearance in three *Pro Se* Project cases and is handling the appeal of one to the 8th Circuit *pro bono*. Both Garvis and Flynn have agreed to review each case the *Pro Se* Project has sent to their firm and have offered to continue to do so as a means to help those underserved by our judicial system and to assist the Court.



Becky R. Thorson
Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, L.L.P.

Becky Thorson has been instrumental in creating and organizing her firm’s annual disability justice seminars. In the two successful years of these seminars, Thorson included the *Pro Se* Project’s participation. By inviting Judge Donovan W. Frank and Tiffany Sanders as panelists both years of the seminar, Thorson increased awareness of the *Pro Se* Project among lawyers and the community and provided tremendous support to the *Pro Se* Project. Thorson’s enthusiastic promotion of the *Pro Se* Project has also included suggestions to reporters to include the *Pro Se* Project’s work, which has resulted in favorable publicity of the *Pro Se* Project in local newspapers,

and her participation in a webcast seminar titled "Access to Justice for People with Disabilities" which showcased the *Pro Se* Project as a vehicle for attorneys to help disabled individuals.



**Rachna B. Sullivan
Fredrikson & Byron, P.A.**

Since becoming FBA President-elect, Rachna Sullivan has made it clear that as long as her firm has no conflicts of interest, she will either find an attorney within her firm to take a *Pro Se* Project case, or take it herself, and she has. Sullivan has either worked on or placed six *Pro Se* Project cases. Despite the number of cases her firm has accepted, Sullivan regularly offers to review cases if there is a need for volunteers. Chief Judge Davis also recognized the law firm of Fredrikson & Byron for its enthusiastic participation in and support of the *Pro Se* Project. Fredrikson & Byron has accepted more than ten *Pro Se* Project cases.



**Steven A. Smith
Nichols Kaster, PLLP**

Approximately one-third of the cases the Court refers to the *Pro Se* Project involve employment discrimination claims and the *Pro Se* Project has seen a recent increase in these types of cases. Steve Smith has been instrumental in helping to fulfill the need for volunteer attorneys to represent employment discrimination plaintiffs. Smith has gladly accepted all five of the referrals the *Pro Se* Project has requested he review, which have included hard-to-place cases, and has expressed his sincere willingness to continue to do so. Steve Smith's active participation in the *Pro Se* Project has been of valuable assistance to *pro se* litigants and the Court in its efforts to improve access to justice.



**Daniel C.
Hedlund and
Amanda M.
Williams
Gustafson Gluek
PLLP**



Dan Hedlund and Amanda Williams recently tried a *Pro Se* Project case to a jury before Magistrate Judge Janie S. Mayeron. The litigant was *pro se* for more than two years before Hedlund and Williams became involved, on the "eve of trial." According to Magistrate Judge Mayeron, Hedlund and Williams did an

"outstanding job" and were a tremendous help to the client and the Court. Magistrate Judge Mayeron was equally impressed with Daniel Nordin and Raina Challeen who briefed and argued pre-trial motions. Chief Judge Davis also recognized the law firm of Gustafson Gluek for its tremendous participation in the *Pro Se* Project. Just this past year, Gustafson Gluek has entered notices of appearance in five *Pro Se* Project cases.



**Charles S. "Bucky"
Zimmerman
Zimmerman Reed**

As part of the settlement of a Guidant Multi-District Litigation (MDL) suit in which Bucky Zimmerman served as Co-Lead Plaintiffs' Counsel, the Court recently approved a \$50,000 cy pres award to the *Pro Se* Project. This is the second cy pres award to the *Pro Se* Project for which Zimmerman has negotiated and received Court approval, and his contributions are instrumental in carrying out the Court's mission of improving access to justice through the *Pro Se* Project.

At the time of the address, the Court had referred 192 cases to the *Pro Se* Project. In 162 of those cases, the *pro se* litigant either consulted with a volunteer attorney or the volunteer attorney represented the individual. In ten cases, the litigant declined to participate in the *Pro Se* Project. The Court involuntarily dismissed three cases before placement with a volunteer attorney, and in six cases, the *pro se* litigant voluntarily dismissed the case before placement. In only three cases was the *Pro Se* Project unable to connect the *pro se* litigant with a volunteer attorney. As Chief Judge Davis commented, this speaks volumes of the Minnesota Chapter of the FBA and of federal practitioners in this District. It is because of the tremendous support, dedication, and participation of federal practitioners in this District that the *Pro Se* Project enjoys the success it does. The Minnesota Chapter of the FBA has made significant strides in assisting the underserved of our judicial system, improving access to justice for all people in the District of Minnesota, helping to expedite the Court's civil docket, and in enhancing the federal practice of law, and for that we should all be proud.

Tiffany A. Sanders is the Coordinator of the *Pro Se* Project. More information about the *Pro Se* Project is available at www.fedbar.org/proseproject2010.

FBA members who are interested in volunteering with the *Pro Se* Project may contact **Tiffany Sanders** at proseproject@q.com or (612) 965-3711.