



A MESSAGE FROM PROBAR'S DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

ProBAR is proud to serve our RGV community and excited to announce the launch of a new Immigration Court Helpdesk to serve community members facing removal proceedings without an attorney.

The Rio Grande Valley (RGV) community, the region that ProBAR calls home, is richly influenced by its proximity to the border with Mexico. For generations, families have moved back and forth across the border for hours, days, weeks, or permanently, and the biculturalism of the region is inextricable from our local community. At the same time, the RGV has also been the point to which many people arrive annually in the United States in search of legal protections and opportunities to contribute to progress in our society.

Permanent immigration status, however, remains out of reach for many of the RGV's immigrant residents. A 2015 study published in the University of Pennsylvania Law Review and titled "[A National Study of Access to Counsel in the Immigration Court](#)" has shown that people who have access to legal services are far more likely to apply for legal relief from deportation and that those who secure an attorney's representation are significantly more likely to win their case. Yet according to the State Bar of Texas's [analysis of Attorney Population Density for 2021-2022](#), the RGV has far fewer attorneys per capita than the state average in Texas - 1 attorney per approximately 771 residents locally compared to 1 attorney per 310 residents statewide. This fact combined with the low median incomes of the region can make private representation difficult or impossible to obtain. In our community, this leaves a significant number of people facing immigration removal proceedings without an attorney.

Since 1989, ProBAR has been a key provider of immigration legal services in the RGV, ensuring that immigrants and asylum-seekers detained in our community have access to legal education and case assistance. We have also participated in the region's response to urgent needs facing immigrants at our border. We have also participated in the region's

response to urgent needs facing immigrants at our border. In 2019, ProBAR joined other RGV organizations and dedicated members of the local private bar in responding to the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) by offering representation and pro se assistance to asylum seekers. When MPP initially wound down in February 2021, we were pleased to form part of the RGV Welcoming Committee that aided asylum seekers as they processed into the United States to pursue their cases. Later, after the program was reinstated by court order, ProBAR launched a Helpdesk program specifically for asylum seekers subject to the MPP program at the Brownsville–Matamoros port of entry.

In July 2022, ProBAR proudly launched another Immigration Court Helpdesk program, this time at the Harlingen Immigration Court, to extend legal services to members of our community facing removal proceedings without an attorney. This program has created a new way for ProBAR to offer free legal access services to non-detained participants without access to representation. The Helpdesk offers free information and pro se assistance—a valuable step in supporting and accompanying individuals in our community. This Helpdesk program builds on other ProBAR initiatives, including our work responding to the unique challenges faced by asylum-seekers in MPP and our robust partnership with La Posada Providencia to provide legal orientations and representation and Social Work support to asylum seekers from all over the world who reside temporarily at their San Benito shelter.

Since ProBAR’s first day of service in 1989, our work has been rooted in a profound commitment to providing high-quality legal representation to detained asylum-seekers and has expanded to offer education, representation, and connections to legal and social services. This Helpdesk program presents an important opportunity to continue to expand our pro bono services and to strategically and intentionally evolve our programs to support our community. We thank our staff, strategic partners, and friends for their outstanding contributions to our work as we improve and strengthen our legal access programs for years to come.

Sincerely,



Brenda Piñero
ProBAR Director of Programs

