



A MESSAGE FROM PROBAR AND COMMISSION ON IMMIGRATION LEADERSHIP

Throughout the year's transitions, ProBAR remains committed to providing transformational legal assistance to immigrants and asylum seekers, energized by the impact of these services for clients like a Cuban couple who recently adjusted status.

In recent weeks, ProBAR celebrated a victory that demonstrates the dedication and perseverance required to successfully help migrants along the U.S. southern border. ProBAR assisted Eva* and Antonio*, a Cuban couple whose road to becoming Lawful Permanent Residents (LPR) began in 2019. After waiting at the border for two months to be allowed to approach a port of entry, Eva and Antonio expressed to border officials their fear of returning to Cuba. At the time, the U.S. government required many Spanish-speaking asylum seekers to remain in Mexico pending a hearing on their asylum application as part of the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP). The couple had no choice; they were returned to Mexico under the MPP program.

ProBAR met Eva and Antonio through our services for asylum seekers subject to MPP, and Staff Attorney and HIAS Border Fellow Lindsay Schenk accepted their cases for representation in spring 2020. Hearings were delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the couple continued waiting in Matamoros, Mexico, for more than one and a half years. There they faced the constant threat of violence and struggled to support themselves - vulnerabilities intensified for Antonio as a Black man.

Finally, when the first wind-down of MPP began in 2021, Eva and Antonio were paroled into the United States to complete their immigration proceedings. Lindsay, supported by ProBAR attorneys Hector Steele, Pedro Spivakovsky-Gonzalez, and Ayra Toro continued to represent the couple, assisting them with obtaining work permits and eventually filing applications to become LPRs through the Cuban Adjustment Act. After more than three years, they each have been granted residency and a pathway to citizenship in the United States.

Eva and Antonio's new lives demonstrate the transformational nature of ProBAR's legal services. Without access to legal information and representation, and heartfelt accompaniment, immigrants face tremendous obstacles to successfully pursuing their cases – a reality exacerbated when they are detained or forced to seek status from outside the United States. ProBAR strives to bridge these barriers by educating people about the immigration laws and by employing those same laws, when possible, to benefit people who are seeking safety, protection, and security in the United States.

As the end of 2022 approaches, we are grateful for our dedicated staff, volunteers, and donors who allow us to achieve our mission of providing high-quality legal services to immigrants and asylum-seekers in the South Texas Rio Grande Valley. This year has been filled with many accomplishments like the ones in Eva and Antonio's cases. Thousands of people received legal information to support their understanding of immigration proceedings and their rights and responsibilities. Staff worked closely with asylum seekers as they prepared for merits hearings – joyfully celebrating when, against difficult odds, protection was granted. People released from immigration custody were supported as they embarked on their journeys to new communities around the country.

2022 also brought transitions that are impacting ProBAR today, and for years to come. This year we said goodbye to ProBAR's longtime director, Kimi Jackson, and director of programs, Brenda Piñero. Kimi and Brenda both left an indelible mark on ProBAR, leading during a period of significant growth, and we are extremely grateful for their service. Today, ProBAR has 263 staff members who bring diverse backgrounds and experiences to their positions, making ProBAR a vibrant community of committed advocates. We are in the process of recruiting a new director and hope to have a new leader in place by early next year.

Transitions bring opportunity, a chance to evaluate our strengths, as well as consider areas for improvement. In the new year we will continue our important work of serving unaccompanied children held in government shelters and serving adults at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers in the Rio Grande Valley. We also plan to engage more frequently with people in the local community, through our new Immigration Court Helpdesk program at the Harlingen Immigration Court, and in partnership with local nonprofit organizations.

ProBAR's staff practice law with humanity. In an unjust world, they engage daily in mission-driven work to ease suffering, to accompany and represent people facing challenging immigration journeys, and to promote fairness and justice. We rely on our external partners for support and appreciate your partnership and interest in our work. We look forward to continuing to engage with you throughout the new year.

Sincerely,



Meredith Linsky
Director, ABA Commission on Immigration
Acting ProBAR Director



Laura Flores Bachman
Director of Legal Programs and Operations,
ABA Commission on Immigration
Acting ProBAR Director



**Names used in this message were changed to protect our client's identity.*