

Public Interest Volunteer Opportunities

Bet Tzedek – the House of Justice invites applications for volunteer placements and externships. Motivated students, post-graduates, attorneys and community members will have a unique opportunity to gain experiential learning while providing much-needed legal resources to low-income individuals.

About Bet Tzedek

Bet Tzedek sets the standard for innovation in public interest law and is one of the top legal agencies in the country providing both direct services and impact litigation assistance to Los Angeles' most vulnerable populations. Bet Tzedek's pioneering projects combine direct legal representation with powerful outreach, education, and legislative advocacy. Our leadership is a dynamic coalition between the public, private and non-profit sectors delivering innovative approaches to address root causes of poverty and exploitation. Our legal expertise and capacity to effect positive, sustainable social change continues to garner national attention.

Bet Tzedek Practice Areas

Family Caregiver

Bet Tzedek provides a holistic range of legal services designed to meet the unique needs of an aging or developmentally disabled client and their respective caregivers. Services may include assistance with public benefits, housing, elder abuse, estate planning, conservatorships, and other matters.

Under staff supervision, volunteers will carry their own caseload which may involve conducting intake interviews, fact investigation, legal research, representing clients in public benefits appeals, assisting with litigation related to elder abuse claims, conservatorship matters, drafting case pleadings, forms and estate planning documents. In addition to direct client services, students may assist in preparing and conducting rights education programs and helping to administer legal clinics.

Employment Rights

Bet Tzedek's Employment Rights Project provides a range of legal services to workers employed in Los Angeles' low-wage, underground economies, including garment, restaurant and agricultural workers, day laborers, janitors, and more. Bet Tzedek files claims before the Los Angeles Division of Labor Standards Enforcement (DLSE) on behalf of low-wage workers for wage-and-hour violations, unemployment insurance denials, workplace discrimination and other matters. Bet Tzedek also addresses employment and humanitarian abuses such as wage theft, workplace retaliation, workplace conditions and human trafficking through impact litigation.

Under staff supervision, volunteers carry their own caseload that may involve conducting intake interviews, legal research, negotiating and litigating worker abuse claims, representing clients in DLSE hearings, and more. In addition to direct client representation, students may assist in preparing and conducting rights education programs for low-wage workers and helping to administer a bi-monthly walk-in legal clinic. ***Spanish-language skills strongly preferred.***

Holocaust Services

Bet Tzedek's Holocaust Survivors' Services program remains one of the only programs in the U.S. that offers free legal services to survivors applying for reparations. In recent years, Bet Tzedek has expanded this program to include a holistic range of legal services designed to meet the unique needs of aging Holocaust survivors, including assistance with public benefits, housing, elder abuse, estate planning, and other matters.

Under staff supervision, volunteers carry their own caseload that may involve conducting intake interviews, legal research, preparing Holocaust reparation applications, representing clients in public benefits appeals, negotiating and litigating landlord-tenant claims, litigating elder abuse claims, representing clients in conservatorship proceedings, drafting estate planning documents and other matters. In addition to direct client representation, students may assist in preparing and conducting elder rights education programs for Holocaust survivors and helping to administer legal clinics with *pro bono* attorneys. ***Russian-language skills strongly preferred.***

Public Interest Volunteer Opportunities

Community Outreach

Bet Tzedek operates a variety of community outreach projects that allows the agency to bring our services to clients at locations across Los Angeles County. Satellite locations include:

Senior Center Outreach: services offered to Angelenos age 55+ at Senior Centers across LA County

SOVA Community Food Banks: in West Hollywood, Pico-Robertson District & Van Nuys

City of West Hollywood Project

Under staff supervision, volunteers will carry their own caseload which may involve conducting intake interviews, legal research, representing clients in public benefits appeals, negotiating landlord-tenant and habitability claims, preparing elder abuse claims, assisting clients in conservatorship and/or guardianship proceedings, and drafting estate planning documents. In addition to direct client services, students may assist in preparing and conducting rights education programs and helping to administer legal clinics with *pro bono* attorneys.

Impact Litigation

Bet Tzedek's Impact Litigation Unit pursues affirmative litigation and appellate advocacy that targets systemic injustice inflicted on society's most vulnerable members. Through these efforts, we achieve broad long-range benefits, beyond the specific case involved, for large numbers individuals. The Unit also engages in community education and advocacy.

Under staff supervision, volunteers will engage in various aspects of impact litigation and policy advocacy in a diverse range of Bet Tzedek's practice areas, including employment rights, housing, and public benefits. Volunteers will work in close collaboration with Bet Tzedek staff, pro bono attorneys, law clerks, and community-based organizations. Primary duties include legal research and writing, meeting with clients, and general investigation through ongoing contact with government agencies.

Elder Abuse and Financial Fraud

Bet Tzedek files lawsuits on behalf of seniors who are victims of elder abuse and title fraud. In addition, since the foreclosure crisis of 2007, our staff attorneys have helped many borrowers obtain loan modifications, postpone sales, and rescind wrongful foreclosures.

Under staff supervision, volunteers will conduct client intake, engage in substantive legal research and writing, draft memorandum, forms, motions, declarations and documentation in furtherance and in support of legal actions on behalf of our clients. Actions include elder abuse restraining orders, conservatorship, and title fraud actions. In addition to filing and developing affirmative suits, volunteers may be asked to attend settlement conferences, and/or represent clients in negotiation proceedings.

Low-Income Tax Advocacy

Bet Tzedek's tax practice provides free legal representation and advice on federal or state income tax cases, as well as certain local tax disputes. We assist clients at all stages of a tax case, including audits, appeals, court proceedings, and collections. Common tax issues faced by low-income individuals include: Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) denials, audits, liens and levies for past due taxes, negotiation of tax debts, innocent spouse relief, and worker misclassification. The project also provides tax education programs that deliver tax information and resources aimed at increasing the tax-related financial literacy of low-income immigrant communities.

Under staff supervision, volunteers will carry their own caseload on a wide variety of tax-related legal issues. The work may involve conducting intake interviews, representing clients in appeals conferences, negotiating offers in compromise, gathering and submitting identity theft affidavits, and other tax-related administrative processes. In addition to direct client representation, students may assist in preparing, coordinating, and delivering tax education programs to underserved populations around Los Angeles.

Public Interest Volunteer Opportunities

Kinship Care

Guardianships

A court-ordered guardianship allows someone other than a parent to care for a minor. By securing this legal relationship, Bet Tzedek helps keep families together by assisting grandparents and non-parent relatives obtain guardianships over young family members. Once appointed, a guardian can take critical steps in day-to-day decisions concerning a child's safety, security, and stability. Guardianship services are provided in both contested and uncontested matters and those with a SIJS component.

SIJS Probate Proceedings

Through our Guardianship practice, Bet Tzedek assists immigrant children who qualify for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Before petitioning for legal permanent resident status (LPR), SIJS law requires a minor to first secure an order from state court, such as Probate Court where guardianship matters are heard, showing that: (i) the child has been abused, abandoned, or neglected; (ii) that the child cannot reunify with one or both parents; and (iii) that it is not in the child's best interest to return to his/her home country. With this order and findings of fact in hand, the child is only then able to submit a petition to the federal government to adjust his/her status to LPR.

Under staff supervision, volunteers will carry their own caseload which may involve conducting intake interviews, fact investigation, legal research, drafting legal memorandum, drafting guardianship and SIJS pleadings, and shadowing attorneys at guardianship and/or SIJS proceedings.

Self-Help Conservatorship Clinics

Bet Tzedek's Self-Help Conservatorship Clinics provide basic, limited assistance to self-represented litigants filing for a probate conservatorship over an aging or developmentally disabled adult. Without a conservatorship, important legal decisions default to the government. Volunteers are needed to staff weekly clinics operated at the Downtown LA Law Library, Norwalk Regional Library, Long Beach Courthouse, and Lancaster Regional Library as well as in Bet Tzedek's Koreatown office. **Placement available to undergraduate students.**

Under staff supervision, volunteers are responsible for providing self-represented litigants with general information and guidance about court processes in petitioning for conservatorships; assisting with filing and preparing conservatorship pleading forms, declarations, motions and supporting documentation; and discussing alternatives to conservatorships.

Intake Services

Bet Tzedek's Intake Services conducts pre-screening assessments to determine legal assistance and representation of potential clients in addition to providing general information and appropriate referrals to other legal and social services agencies and community resources in Los Angeles County. **Placement available to undergraduate students.**

Under staff supervision, volunteers will develop and exercise foundational legal skills, such as issue-spotting in assessing and determining income- and case-type eligibility; fact investigation skills in soliciting and documenting client needs and issues; client interaction skills in assisting and communicating with clients dealing with challenging situations.

Transgender Medical-Legal Partnership

In partnership with the LGBT Bar Association of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles LGBT Center, Bet Tzedek provides advocacy with regard to a range of legal issues impacting members of the transgender community, with a focus on ensuring access to health care services.

Under staff supervision, volunteers will develop and exercise foundational legal skills, such as issue-spotting; fact investigation skills in soliciting and documenting client needs and issues; client interaction skills; case management skill; document drafting skills; and policy advocacy.

Public Interest Volunteer Opportunities

Small Business Development Project

For low-income households and communities, entrepreneurship and small business success offer a rare path out of poverty. But to survive and thrive, these businesses – like all businesses – need good guidance. Bet Tzedek provides legal support to these small business entrepreneurs to nurture talent and empower those who seek to build a better future in marginalized and under-served communities. Issues addressed in the project include tax, employment law, commercial leases, and trademark, to name just a few.

Under staff supervision, volunteers will help conduct outreach and education workshops, meet with clients to conduct intake interviews, and help clients address a range of transactional needs.

Application Process

Qualifications

- Demonstrated commitment to public interest/service and/or empathy for elderly, disabled and low-income populations
- Detail-oriented in addition to excellent research, writing, and oral communication skills
- Bilingual applicants preferred, but not required

Academic Year Placements

We welcome students interested in academic externships as well as unpaid internships and work study. *We prefer part-time externs/volunteers to commit to working full days whenever possible with a minimum requirement of 8-hours a week over a 10-week period.*

Applications must include:

- (1) Volunteer Application
- (2) Cover Letter
- (3) Resume

Applications accepted on a rolling basis.

Submit applications to the Pro Bono & Volunteer Coordinator via email:
volunteer@bettzedek.org