

Innovative STAR Program for Former Prisoners

Magistrate Judges Tim Rice and Phil Restrepo of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania have worked with the U.S. Attorney's Office to develop the unique and innovative Supervision to Aid Re-Entry (STAR). It helps former inmates through a year-long program in which they report twice-monthly to the court rather than to probation officers. The program assists the former offenders with many issues, including getting a job, signing up for a GED course or for college classes and dealing with a bad credit history. The program has had great success in reducing the rate of recidivism.

Please contact Mary Gay Scanlon at scanlonm@ballardspahr.com or Kathy Ochroch at Ochroch@BlankRome.com if you are interested in representing one of these clients (which are being referred through Philadelphia VIP).

Judges Rice and Restrepo report having noticed that many of the STAR program participants have problems with their driver's licenses. Without a driver's license, the former inmate is often unable to find work or to get to work, thereby increasing the chances of recidivism. The court is looking for attorneys who are willing to take on these pro bono Traffic Court cases and to help these clients get back on their feet. There is a DVD of a training session on "How to Handle a Traffic Court Case" as well as written materials, which will be provided to any attorneys interested in these cases. Mentors are available to assist with the cases. See the descriptions of the available Traffic Court cases below.

At first glance these cases may not seem that glamorous or exciting, but they are a great opportunity to make a large impact with a small investment of time. As an example, consider the case of this real-life client: A homeless veteran who previously had a serious substance abuse problem, during which he received many driving violations and his driver's license was suspended. He then went into rehab, and he also received job counseling and other support. When he came out of a lengthy rehab stay, he was clean and sober and was offered a job at a hardware store in a neighboring town. He was also granted visitation rights with his 9-year-old son. However, without a driver's license, he had no way to get to the new job or to pick up his son for his visits. After a couple of meetings with the client and a hearing in Traffic Court, his lawyer was able to resolve the issues. The client entered into a very reasonable payment plan that he could afford and his license was reinstated. He was then able to accept the new job, visit his son and truly start his life over – and it only required a limited, discrete commitment of time from the pro bono volunteer.

Here are a couple of the currently available cases which are representative of the cases available under this program:

Licenses (Auto and Other)

(66) 090138

Client, who is part of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania prisoner re-entry program, needs assistance restoring his driver's license. Client's license is currently in suspension. Client needs representation to eliminate or lower the suspension fines. Client needs his license in order to be able to find viable work and reenter into society and community.

Licenses (Auto and Other)

(66) 090319

Client, who is a part of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania prisoner re-entry program, needs assistance reinstating his driver's license.

When attempting to restore his license, client discovered that his license had been suspended.