

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

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## Firms host immigrant clinics

### Legal aid group sets up way for lawyers to navigate logistics of federal program

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Attorney Andrew Scroggins said he could sense the excitement in the lobby of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP last week as young illegal immigrants waited to apply for help in an effort to avoid deportation and obtain a work permit from the federal government.

The law firm hosted the National Immigrant Justice Center's (NIJC) first Dreamers Clinic on Friday, where 21 young immigrants met with pro bono attorneys to fill out a application for the deportation deferral. The deferral is good for up to two years.

The Obama administration announced the program June 15 and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services began to accept applications Aug. 15.

About 72,000 young people applied so far, The Associated Press reported.

"When I saw our lobby full of people waiting to be helped, it really brought it home to me in a different way than just hearing about lines at offices around the country," said Scroggins, an associate at the firm.

Jorge Mena, a 24-year-old undocumented immigrant from Mexico, attended the clinic and said the attorneys helped him navigate through a complicated and lengthy deferral application form.

Mena arrived in the U.S. at age 8 from Guadalajara, Mexico.

"Being undocumented limits pretty much your entire life," he said. "Every decision you make goes back to the fact that you don't have your papers."

When he applied to college, for example, he could not obtain student loans, he said. Even with a bachelor's degree from

University of Illinois at Chicago, he cannot find a professional job without a Social Security number, he said.

Since Aug. 15, the NIJC estimates it assisted about 20,000 young illegal immigrants around the country, said Mony Ruiz-Velasco, the NIJC's legal director.

The NIJC plans 10 Dreamer Clinics and each reached capacity within 24 hours after registration opened, she said.

"It's been an overwhelming number of people who have reached out for help," she said.

Among other requirements, immigrants must have arrived in the U.S. before age 16 and remain younger than 30 years old to remain eligible. Earlier this week, the government began approving applications and granting work permits, The Associated Press reported.

The volunteer attorneys at the clinic helped guide the clients through the online form, which asks for a variety of documentation such as passports, birth certificates and school transcripts.

"It's really urgent and important that those individuals

**“It takes a lot of courage for some of these folks to step forward after trying to live in obscurity and volunteer all this information.”**



Valerie E. Manos (left), an associate at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP, worked with client, Andrea Rosales, during a pro bono clinic at the firm, hosted by the National Immigrant Justice Center, on Friday. The clinic is related to a new federal program that allows young illegal immigrants to apply for temporary relief from deportation. *Natalie Battaglia*

who are eligible obtain this protection while the program exists," said Mary M. McCarthy, executive director of the NIJC. "It could end at any time depending on the administration."

Since the program remains a presidential directive from President Obama, it could cease with a change in the administration, McCarthy said.

Thomas F. Hurka, a partner at Morgan, Lewis who helped organize Friday's Dreamers Clinic, said he initially wondered whether some immigrants might feel fearful or hesitant to offer personal documents to the federal government. But he said many seemed excited and relieved.

"It takes a lot of courage for some of these folks to step forward after trying to live in obscurity and volunteer all this information to the federal government," he said.

One of Hurka's clients, a young college student born in Mexico, attended the clinic with her father. She graduated from a local high school and recently entered her senior year at Lake Forest College.

"Here's somebody who by all measures is academically successful, despite the fact that she's undocumented," he said. "But the fact is, employers require Social Security numbers, so after working so hard to get to that level, what does she do next?"

On Tuesday, Sidley, Austin LLP and JPMorgan Chase & Co. hosted NIJC's second Dreamers Clinic at the law firm's office on Dearborn Street.

The interest from law firms who want to help exceeds the number of clinics the organization can afford to host, McCarthy said. The NIJC said it hopes for additional funding to hire another staff member to expand the clinics, she said.

The other law firms hosting Dreamers Clinics are: Butler, Rubin, Saltarelli & Boyd LLP; Drinker, Biddle & Reath LLP; Grippo & Elden LLC; SNR Denton; Mayer, Brown LLP; Kirkland & Ellis LLP; DLA Piper; and Faegre, Baker, Daniels LLP.

Several other firms remain in the process of planning additional clinics with the NIJC.