

**Government of India  
Ministry of Law and Justice  
Department of Justice**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono Legal Services)**

**Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on Pro Bono Club Scheme (PBCS)**

**1. Background**

At the outset, it is important to mention that the spirit to serve the community *pro bono* "in public good"<sup>1</sup> has always remained a core value amongst the legal fraternity. There are lawyers who are dedicated to work suo-moto providing pro bono support in wide range of legal domain (ranging from advices, filing cases, representation in the court etc.) to the unrepresented litigants in their individual and volunteer capacity. But despite this voluntary work undertaken at an individual level, there is a large section of the underprivileged, marginalized, poor population who has little or no means of getting justice, in a meaningful way, for their legal problems. These people have limited access to the justice delivery system, mainly because of the high cost involved in engaging advocates of reasonably good standing, and also because of their inability to understand the legal system optimally. In order to fill this gap a provision is created under the Legal Services Authority Act, 1987(LSA)<sup>2</sup>, LSAs constituted at the central, state and district levels to provide state funded legal services to eligible persons belonging to weaker sections of the society. However, it is observed that as the quality of legal aid is still dependent on government funding /grants and the readiness & willingness of lawyers to undertake such a work on limited financial support, a huge gap of demand and supply exists between the Applicants who are

---

<sup>1</sup>The term pro bono, short for "pro bono publico", is a Latin term which means "for the public good". In practice, the term is used specifically in context of the legal profession- referring to the practice of giving voluntary legal advice to individuals and organizations that are unable to afford legal advice and/or cannot access legal aid. Those in genuine need of legal help are, thus, represented by lawyers for free or at a minimal cost – presenting them with an opportunity to meaningfully address their legal problems.

<sup>2</sup>The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, An Act to constitute legal services authorities to provide free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities, and to organize LokAdalats to secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity

inhibited to court accessibility due to economic or financial hardships and the availability of Advocates interested to do pro bono work.

Though there is a huge support for pro bono litigation, the challenges of pandemic & lockdown have created a lot of unrest and anxiety not only in the lives of the needy and marginalized section due to increased economic and poverty distress but a similar impact could also be seen in the legal fraternity, where the income of a lawyer is dependent on the client paying timely and appropriate fee. However, economically deprived the lives on both sides are, the importance of pro bono work holds ground as it provides more reliable and personable solutions to those who need them.

Embarking on “last mile delivery” vision under Digital India, Department of Justice (DoJ) has been devising and integrating many approaches to bring about systemic reforms under justice sector and to establish a pan India framework for dispensation of pro bono legal services across the country. Acknowledging this, in April, 2017, DoJ launched Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono Legal Services) Programme to undertake a digital drive to connect practicing advocates<sup>3</sup> interested in pro bono work with eligible marginalized and vulnerable beneficiaries via mobile technology, after due scrutiny. In this regard, DoJ developed Mobile Application (Android & iOS version) for both citizens and advocates. The App has been uploaded on UMANG platform in collaboration with Ministry of Information and Technology (MeiTY). To further strengthen and ensure a decentralized presence of pro bono advocates at the state level, in June 2020, DoJ approached Registrar Generals of 25 High Courts, requesting them to set up and integrate pro bono panel of lawyers in each High Court. To ease registration, process a dedicated web portal has been developed wherein all the High courts have been shared username and password, so that High Courts can register interested Pro bono advocates. As on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2021, 502 Advocates have been registered as Nyaya Bandhu under 14 High Court panels.

With these entire endeavors, till 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2021, 3,710 advocates have registered from 24 State Bar Councils to offer pro bono services under its Nyaya Bandhu platform. To add to this a total of 1,414 beneficiaries/applicants have got registered to seek legal advice and representation. From conjoint analysis of the Nyaya Bandhu Advocates and Applicants data it has been observed that due to non-availability of Nyaya Bandhu advocates in almost 50 districts, many of the

---

<sup>3</sup>Any advocate interested in becoming a part of this initiative must have a valid practicing licence from a State Bar Council whereas beneficiaries, in order to avail the benefits of the same must belong to one of the categories mentioned under Section 12 of The Legal Services Authority Act of 1987.

applicants are still unrepresented, and many more beneficiaries may exist which are still unaccounted for.

To respond to the above need, in December 2017 & January 2018, a mid-term review of the programme was conducted to consolidate the learning's from the operation of the existing pro bono programme, thus far, and to this end, extensive consultations were held with pro bono lawyers and civil society organizations. One of the primary concerns flagged, during this process, was time constraint and lack of human assistance faced by pro bono lawyers in rendering pro bono legal services under the DoJ programme. According to stakeholders consulted, inadequate support for lawyers in delivery of pro bono services often compromised timelines and quality of services tendered to beneficiaries. In the year, 2020 DoJ conducted a third party evaluation of its Nyaya Bandhu programme wherein one of the recommendation to retain or attract new lawyers to volunteer as pro bono is by providing them the support of the law students, wherein prominent law schools in India could also be encouraged to follow this practice and the link to the scheme could be displayed on their website.

Therefore, to cater to the law students and to instill in their young minds a responsibility to the community, so that many could continue to offer pro bono services even after completion of graduation, in June 2020, sub module on Pro Bono Club Scheme (PB Club) was designed with an aim to strengthen the existing probono programme, by integrating law schools and students within its fold. The original PB club document was circulated to all National Law Schools, inviting them to be a part of the PB Club. Three mandatory criteria were outlined before the release of grant to the law schools, who acquiesced to be part of the PB Club. Firstly, registration of law schools on the online dashboard created for the purpose, Secondly submission of proposal with an activity plan and budget breakup and satisfactory acceptance by DoJ of the proposal.

Based on the analysis and review of the Proposal that were received and the exigency caused due to the Covid situation in the country, DoJ decided to revisit its original PB document. In that exercise, DoJ has now come out with a restructured PB Club document for the Financial Year 2021-2022 to suit its broader vision of culture of and movement on Pro Bono in the country under its newly constituted Pan India Scheme on Access to Justice titled **“Designing Innovative Solutions and Holistic Access to Justice (DISHA)”<sup>4</sup>**

---

<sup>4</sup> Department of Justice has formulated a pan India Scheme on Access to Justice titled “Designing Innovative Solutions and Holistic Access to Justice(DISHA). The scheme aims to consolidate different programmes of Legal

## **2. Key Objectives of the P B Club**

- i. To improve efficiency and quality of pro bono legal services by providing assistance to pro bono advocates through law students
- ii. To instill in young legal minds their responsibility to community by understanding and practicing pro bono legal services for the unassisted and disadvantaged persons in the societies.

## **3. Scope of PB Club**

- i. Under DISHA, a total of 80 new Law Schools have to be integrated for the FY 2021-2026. In the year 2020-2021- (29) Law schools have agreed to participate and 20 new law schools are to be on-boarded in the FY 2021-2022. Law schools are selected from the Tier-1; Tier-II and Tier –III cities to ensure greater participation and geographical outreach.
- ii. The PB Club is to maintain separate set of activities from the Legal Aid Clinic being run in the Law Schools;

## **4. Composition of Pro Bono Clubs:**

- i. The Club would be registered with the DoJ, Government of India, in any manner specified by the department for the purpose. At present DoJ has developed an online module to ease the process of registration. The access to this online Dashboard is given once DoJ accepts the proposal submitted by the Law school
- ii. The Club would be headed by a fulltime Faculty-in-charge, and a student committee (comprising of 10 students selected by the Faculty-in Charge). The Students committee should maintain minimum 7 members at any time of the year, in case of any student graduating or ceases to be a part of the Committee
- iii. The students joining the club would be called as Pro Bono Associates or PBA's. These PBAs shall be selected, after due procedure, by the Faculty-in-charge from amongst the 2<sup>nd</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup> year law students (in case of five-year

---

aid and legal empowerment being run by DoJ under one umbrella which includes Tele-Law: Reaching the Unreached (to facilitate pre litigation advice and consultation); Nyaya Bandhu( Pro Bono Legal Services ) to facilitate dispensation framework on pro bono in the country; Nyaya Mitra ( to facilitate the reduction of pendency in district courts) and pan India legal literacy and legal awareness programme. DISHA promotes integration of technology and contextualized IEC on access to justice.

law programme) and 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> year law students (in case of three-year law programme) & LLM students.

- iv. The student committee, under the guidance of the Faculty-in-charge would manage the administrative and financial functions of the club. The PBAs should be appropriately compensated for any travel or incidental expenses (printing; payment of any fee) incurred to assist the beneficiary/Applicant during their legal assistance/representation
- v. In meeting the objectives and underlined PB Club activities mentioned at Para 5, the PB Club could be made functional based on two models :-
  - **Assisted Model:** Taking support from any other CSO / Law firm / or any other Organization who would supplement and complement the running of P B Club
  - **Unassisted Model:** PB Club to run its activities independently without any support from external agency.

## 5. Activities of Pro Bono Clubs:

In order to promote a culture of pro bono, Law Schools can undertake a series of activities. Upon incorporating the particular activities mentioned below, Law Schools may also add their own pro bono activities. All the activities would be carried out under the overall guidance of the Faculty – in-Charge and in consultation with the Students committee

- i. **Pro Bono Litigation Assistance-** It forms the significant component of the Scheme. Under the overall guidance of the Faculty-in-Charge, the PB Club could define the ambit / types of the pro bono litigation assistance. Broadly pro bono litigation assistance can take the form of legal research, drafting, documentation etc
  - Number of cases assigned to the PBAs, based on their Year in the Law School, area of interest
  - Number of Number of cases pending / continuing with the PBAs
  - Number of PBAs supporting the Advocates under the DoJ Nyaya Bandhu Panels in the High Court

- Mechanism to be made for handing over the case, in case of PBAs dropping out ; graduating or for any other reason
- Number of Hours to be spent by PBA
- Number of alumni's tapped every month. Law schools can keep their own aspirational targets. However minimum 15 Alumni who are interested may be made to register on Nyaya Bandhu portal.(Maintain a database of Alumni Nyaya Bandhu Advocates/ (ANBA)
- Number of session organized by the Law Schools in training the Advocates/ Applicants on registering on the Nyaya Bandhu App.
- Number of pro bono cases taken by their ANBA at the District/High/ Supreme Court or at the District/High/Supreme Court Legal Services Committee /at the district /State/National Legal Service Authorities.
- Number of Mentoring Sessions undertaken by Senior Advocates for junior advocates/ ANBA and PBAs to understand the dynamics of pro bono litigation assistance.
- Track the type of cases/ matters in which pro bono litigation assistance is provided for e.g., cases of death penalty; rape; etc
- Number of cases/matters in which follow up was done by the PBA
- Number of cases in which feedback from the beneficiaries have been collected

## ii. **Community Care Legal Assistance (CCLA)**

- Adopt a village /taluk (at least two)
- Number of mobile **(CCLA) set up in a Year**
- Number of contextualized material developed to educate the masses on Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono Legal Services)
- Number of web banner/Posters/Brochure developed, designed and displayed on the Law School webpage & other social media handles (mention in print and electronic both)

- Number of Field visits undertaken by PBAs
- Number of Legal awareness sessions conducted in coordination with legal aid committee in the law School
- Number of Talks/ Seminars (hybrid mode both physical and online) to promote pro bono

### **iii. Research, Documentation & Reporting**

- Developed any Standard Operating Procedure / Dos/Don't on pro bono litigation assistance
- Quarterly Newsletter on PB Club
- Compendium of Success Stories of the pro bono cases undertaken by the PB club(Bi annual)
- To submit monthly and Bi-monthly reports. The Monthly Progress Report Format is **at Annexure(A)**.

### **iv. Promote Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism**

- Organize Client Counselling and Client interviewing Competition for the PBAs
- Number of training sessions provided on Mediation organized for PBAs / Law students
- Types /Matters on which PBAs supported meditation

### **v. Recognition and Awards for PBAs and Alumni Nyaya Bandhu Advocates**

- 6. Curriculum for an Optional Paper on Pro Bono –** Law schools may design a curriculum on Pro Bono Legal Services (to be imparted as an Optional Paper), in consultation with DoJ, which may later be submitted to Bar Council for its guidance and suggestions. In taking this forward under the aegis of DoJ, a sub-committee would be constituted to design and oversee the work of curriculum development on Pro Bono as an optional paper in law schools.
- 7. Role and Responsibilities of the Law Schools**

- i. The law school shall complete its registration on the DoJ website including renewal of registration after due submission and acceptance of the annual report on PBC activities;
- ii. The law schools shall appoint at least one full time faculty member as in-charge of the PB club.
- iii. The Law school shall provide necessary infrastructure for the clubs and other equipment's such as computer, printer, scanner, stationary for filing, documentation etc.
- iv. Room for consultancy between beneficiaries, pro bono advocates and PBAs
- v. The internal management of the club shall be left to the discretion of the respective law school.
- vi. Utilize all funds provided only for the PB Club activities and ensuring that funds are not wrongly utilized. Provide utilization certificate to Department of Justice
- vii. Law Schools will ensure that all activities set out at para 5 are being satisfactorily carried in accordance with timelines set forth.
- viii. Ensure that PB club shall maintain clear, accurate and complete records in respect of the funds received under the PB Club Scheme. Law schools shall furnish true and accurate information and data on activities undertaken, compile and make available at all times to DoJ any records or information concerning the P B Club. It shall also ensure that P B Club does not divulge any sensitive /confidential information to any third party without the consent of DoJ

## **8. Monitoring and Review by Department of Justice**

- i. DoJ has developed an online reporting and monitoring online dashboard. Necessary changes would be made to suit the present PB Club activity / timeline planner
- ii. DoJ shall conduct monthly review meetings and undertake assessment visits to the PB Clubs as and when required; PB Club/ Law Schools would provide necessary support.



- iii. All relevant reports /IEC material concerning the PB Club will be suitably attributed to the Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono Legal Services) of DoJ and will bear approved logs of DoJ.
- iv. Any amendment made in future, with respect to the implementation P B Club and nature of activities shall be done in consultation between DoJ and Law School, and the change so considered, shall stand amended for the purpose of the Proposal submitted by that Law school
- v. Both the Law School and DoJ shall, in consultation with each other make use of each other knowledge products and information accessed in relation to this project, subject to acknowledgement and attribution of the same and specifically for purposes of awareness and public education and not for profit.

## 9. Operational financial Implication

- i. The PB club shall get an annual grant of Rupees 1,00,000 /- each for two years accordingly for the purpose of running the club related activities as mentioned at Para 5 & 6.
- ii. The grant shall be sanctioned in the first year upon submission of the Proposal mentioned at **Annexure B** as per the Activities laid down under Para 5 and budget (mentioned at sub Para I of above ) and upon satisfactory acceptance by the DoJ, within two weeks of the receiving of the Proposal and ensuring necessary compliances
- iii. Thereafter, a username and password would be generated by DoJ for online registration of the PB Club and for reporting and monitoring work on Nyaya Bandhu website(<https://probono-doj.in/>)
- iv. The P B Club understand and agree that the second year grant would be released on submission of the grant application for renewal of grant of Rupees 1,00,000/- for the second year, accompanied with a **Year End Assessment Report, (usually undertaken by an Independent Third Party)** and also mentioning the completion of activities outlined at Para 5& Para 6, along for the grant
- v. The PB Club could solicit the CSR support of Law firms/ or Corporate Houses to sustain the PB Clubs activities

vi. DoJ to make timely payments to the PB Club once all reports and are found to be in order.

\*\*\*\*\*