

The POWER Act



Office for Access to Justice
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Promoting Pro Bono Services for Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault & Stalking

Each year, [55 million Americans experience an estimated 260 million legal problems](#). But for many, solving those problems requires access to legal representation that can be difficult to obtain or afford. Access to justice barriers can be especially harmful when safety from violence is at stake.

- Legal services are one of the most requested needs of victims and survivors of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. But among women survivors of rape, or physical or intimate violence by an intimate partner who reported needing legal services, [64 percent](#) did not receive that assistance. An even higher number of male survivors reported not having their legal needs met.
- Legal issues resulting from domestic violence often go beyond the immediate need for safety from violence or abuse, cascading into [issues](#) related to housing, family, child welfare, healthcare, education, consumer debt, or the ability to maintain a stable income.
- The Legal Services Corporation's [2022 Justice Gap report](#) showed that 98% of low-income households with recent domestic violence survivors experienced—in addition to the domestic violence—at least one civil legal problem, and 87% experienced at least five.

[Studies](#) confirm that lawyers and legal help make a difference in legal outcomes. Pro bono attorneys—whether from private law firms, legal service providers, corporations, or the federal government—play a critical role in filling the justice gap for victims and survivors.

The Pro Bono Work to Empower and Represent (POWER) Act promotes efforts across the country to **empower survivors** of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking **through pro bono legal services**.

The [POWER Act](#) is a federal law that promotes pro bono legal services as a critical way to empower survivors of gender-based violence. The POWER Act requires that:

- The Chief District Court Judge for each federal judicial district lead at least one public event a year promoting pro bono legal services for survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking;
- POWER Act events be held in partnership with a State, local, Tribal, or territorial domestic violence service provider or coalition and a State or local volunteer lawyer project; and
- Federal judicial districts encompassing an Indian Tribe or Tribal organizations lead at least one POWER Act event every two years in partnership with an Indian Tribe or Tribal organization.

"If not for the representation and coordination of my attorneys in Washington State and Chicago, I would have had to fight alone to protect myself and my son."

— Survivor [testifying](#) before the Senate Judiciary Committee

The justice gap is even wider for many Tribal communities. Over [four in five American Indian and Alaska Native adults have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime](#), including domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Tribal communities are also often located in rural areas with few practicing attorneys or legal service providers, meaning that victims and survivors in these communities often [face unique barriers](#) in accessing legal remedies for the violence that they experience.

POWER Act Events Are a Critical Tool for Mobilizing Pro Bono Attorneys, Legal Services Providers, and Community Organizations

POWER Act events can serve as a catalyst for change in your community, inspiring attorneys interested in pro bono work and fostering connections with community members, organizations, and coalitions working to close the justice gap for survivors.

Collaboration can enhance the impact and value of POWER Act programming, to best advance the goal of increasing meaningful pro bono volunteerism.

- POWER Act events can be most effective when they prioritize the critical perspectives of survivors, including those from Tribal communities, and incorporate expertise from legal service providers, volunteer lawyer projects and pro bono programs, and domestic violence service providers, organizations and coalitions.
- Pro bono volunteers who are fluent in languages other than English (both spoken and sign) should be made aware of the great need for their services in helping survivors who communicate in languages other than English, and all volunteers should understand language access resources available to serve these communities.
- Organizations and providers can also consider how nonlawyer legal help may be promoted, such as through the social workers and victim advocates who have been key resources for survivors navigating legal processes.

The POWER Act requires that courts “conducting a public event... seek to **maximize the local impact** of the event and the provision of access to high-quality pro bono legal services by survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.” Local impact can include highlighting local data on the problem, discussing local issues or legal nuances, and promoting local resources, legal services, and pro bono programs.

Resources from the Office for Access to Justice & Department of Justice

As the [national government office](#) dedicated to promoting equal access to justice, the Office for Access to Justice (ATJ) can provide resources and support to all stakeholders focused on the implementation of the POWER Act.

- ATJ leads the [Federal Government Pro Bono Program](#), which coordinates over 50 federal agencies to support their legal staff’s engagement in pro bono activities nationwide. Courts, federal agencies, legal service providers, and domestic violence service providers are invited to collaborate with the Program at ATJ’s headquarters in D.C. or with one of the program’s branches in nine cities across the U.S.
- ATJ can also support in the development of resources to promote legal assistance for survivors, like the [“Know Your Rights” pamphlet](#) ATJ published in partnership with the Office on Violence Against Women and the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys to provide information on a new civil cause of action for survivors who have had intimate photos or videos shared without consent.
- The Office on Violence Against Women’s [compendium](#) of State, local, Tribal, and territorial domestic violence and sexual assault service providers may prove helpful in identifying partners for POWER Act events.
- Courts are encouraged to contact their local U.S. Attorney’s Office, which may be able to coordinate with ATJ to assist in identifying potential speakers, partners, and other relevant community- and district-specific information.

Since the initial passage of the POWER Act, district court efforts have resulted in pro bono legal summits across the nation. In FY 2022 alone, [81% of district courts](#) hosted or co-sponsored POWER Act events, reaching over 6,000 people.

Too many individuals across the country experience domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking. This violence has multi-faceted consequences that affect mental and physical health, financial security, as well as individual, family, and public safety. It is the responsibility of the entire legal community to ensure meaningful and equal access to justice for victims and survivors.

Contact the Office for Access to Justice if we can support your POWER Act implementation.

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