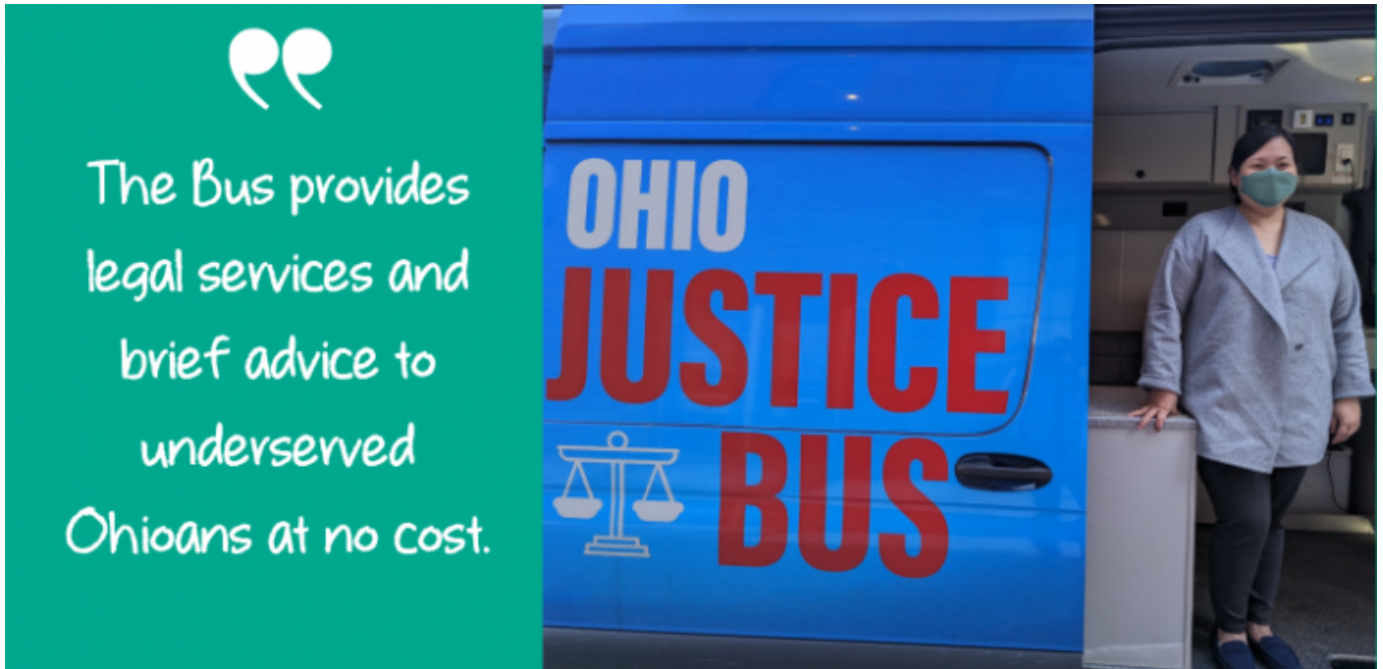


Taking it to the streets: Ohio Justice Bus expands access to justice



An interview with Sophia Chang, Esq., Pro Bono Director at the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation

This week, Community Legal Aid sat down with Sophia Chang, Pro Bono Director at the [Ohio Access to Justice Foundation](#) to talk about the beloved Ohio Justice Bus which has been increasing access to legal services across Ohio for nearly four years. In her position, Sophia collaborates with legal aid organizations, the Supreme Court of Ohio, bar associations, and other entities to grow local and statewide pro bono resources in Ohio. She formerly served as counsel with American Electric Power and as a staff attorney and magistrate with the Ohio Court of Claims. She is a graduate of the College of Arts & Sciences, the John Glenn School of Public Affairs, and the Moritz College of Law at The Ohio State University.

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CLA: Thank you for talking with us! Some of our readers have heard of it, but many have not - what is the Ohio Justice Bus?

Sophia: In 2017, through a statewide summit on pro bono, the idea of the Ohio Justice Bus was proposed to help serve rural and underserved Ohioans with their civil legal needs. The Ohio Access to Justice Foundation (the Foundation) supported the planning and procurement of the Bus and the Bus launched in the fall of 2019 with financial support provided by the Supreme Court of Ohio, the AEP Foundation, and the Foundation.

The Bus is a mobile legal office that serves as a technology hub and office space that allows volunteer attorneys to meet with clients in-person or virtually. In order to provide those services, the Bus is equipped with the technology to do everything from searching court records to printing pleadings.

CLA: What barriers to legal help does the Ohio Justice Bus help clients overcome?

Sophia: The biggest barriers the Bus helps clients overcome are access to lawyers and technology as well as transportation. Being fully equipped with the technology needed in a legal office and going to trusted community partners near their home, the Bus helps bridge the access divide.

CLA: What types of services do you provide clients?

Sophia: The Bus provides legal services and brief advice to underserved Ohioans at no cost to clients in areas of law including family law, housing, benefits, consumer debt, record sealing, immigration, and wills and probate.

CLA: Tell us about the response of the judiciary to this model of service delivery?

Sophia: Courts across the state have reached out to the Bus to hold recurring clinics in their counties. Currently, the Bus has several monthly and quarterly clinics. One of those partnerships is with the Summit County Domestic Relations Court where Judge Katarina Cook presides. Judge Cook recognized the need for pro bono legal services in family and domestic relations legal issues and reached out to the Bus to plan and implement a quarterly clinic in Summit County based on those issues. The first clinic occurred on March 15, 2023, with 55 community members attending, and the next clinic will be held on June 16, 2023, from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Partners include Community Legal Aid, the Victim Assistance Program, the Child Support Enforcement Agency, and Asian Services in Action.

CLA: How does the Ohio Justice Bus partner with individual legal aid organizations?

Sophia: The Bus has an open communication line with all of the legal aid organizations in Ohio. The Bus welcomes any partnership with the legal aids and invites them to partner in the Bus' clinics in their respective service areas. One good thing about the partnership is that the Bus doesn't have the same constraints on service so if someone shows up to a clinic who isn't eligible for legal aid, the Bus can still provide services.

CLA: Talk about your relationship with local Bar associations and private practice attorneys. How do you collaborate to serve the community?

Sophia: The Bus' volunteers are primarily private practice attorneys. Some attorneys sign up individually after hearing about our services. However, the Bus also recruits from bar associations across the state. If you're interested in signing up to be a volunteer, please fill out our volunteer form [here](#).

CLA: What has been the feedback from private practice attorneys who volunteer at Ohio Justice Bus events?

Sophia: Our volunteer attorneys love the concept of the Bus. They also love the convenience of being able to volunteer remotely, especially if the Bus is going to be

far from where they practice. Many attorneys who were raised in more rural areas of Ohio also enjoy being able to help people in their hometown through the Bus' clinics.

CLA: What types of events does the Ohio Justice Bus attend?

Sophia: The Bus attends its own clinics, clinics with partner legal services organizations, and events like community fairs and festivals.

CLA: Can any court or organization request that the Ohio Justice Bus participate in an event? If so, what is that process? Some of our readers may be interested!

Sophia: Yes, the Bus is open to requests and would be happy to talk through potential partnerships. If you're interested in the Bus for an event or clinic, please email help@ohiojusticebus.org.

CLA: What is your vision for the future of this project?

Sophia: The Bus hopes to serve Ohioans in all 88 counties and to continue its work across the state. As long as the Bus is helping Ohioans with their civil legal needs, that's all that matters.

This article is part of Legal Aid's ["Big Ideas" series](#).

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