



## U.S.-Mexico Bar Association Barra de Abogados México-Estados Unidos

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### ***PRO BONO IN THE AMERICAS: A COLLECTIVE EFFORT***

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In January 2008, the *Pro Bono* Declaration for the Americas went into effect as a result of years of collaboration among lawyers, law firms, law schools, and bar associations across the United States and Latin America. The purpose of the Declaration is simultaneously a reaffirmation of the importance of legal philanthropy and a call to action by legal professionals to expand pro bono initiatives in both North and South America.

Projects like the *Pro Bono* Declaration for the Americas are an important step toward the goal of protecting the rights of individuals who either cannot access or afford competent legal services, particularly in Latin America, where the rate of philanthropic giving in general is among the lowest in the world. In fact, in a 2007 “World Wealth Report” published by CapGemini and Merrill Lynch, it was found that wealthy Latin Americans donate only 3% of their assets to charitable ventures due to public skepticism of non-profit and non-governmental organizations, which have historically been plagued with corruption. Although several top firms in the region have launched *pro bono* programs to address this need, Latin America still lags far behind the rest of the world.

Latin American émigrés in the United States suffer from a similar lack of proper legal counsel, especially in regards to immigration and asylum issues. Significantly compounding the problem is the widespread practice of *notario* fraud. In Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, a *notario publico* must be a licensed lawyer; this is not the case in the United States where the term “notary public” implies a much narrower skill set. Taking advantage of this cultural misunderstanding, unscrupulous notary publics sometimes pose as lawyers or “*notarios publicos*,” misleading Latin American immigrants and severely hindering their efforts to gain legal status in the United States. However, thanks to charitable initiatives like the American Bar Association’s **FightNotarioFraud** project, significant progress has been made. Launched in 2008, the project educates immigrants with notario claims and directs them to pro bono attorneys. In fact, US laws are now in effect that strictly prohibit the translation of “Notary Public” into Spanish in order to prevent any confusion about the roles.

It is important that legal professionals try to do their part to support and increase pro bono efforts worldwide, because the need for adequate legal resources is serious and widespread. The Pro Bono Declaration of the Americas states that “members of the legal profession have a responsibility to provide pro bono legal services. This responsibility stems from the profession’s role and purpose in society, and from its implicit commitment to a fair and equitable legal system.” As the world’s leading provider of legal support services, TransPerfect Legal Solutions (TLS) recognizes the need for efficient, effective, and affordable legal services around the world, and we gladly take on the responsibility to increase access to these services to benefit the larger cause of justice. As such, TLS created the industry’s first program that enables law firms to earn free services for their public interest cases. Law firms who are members of the TLS Pro Bono Program accrue credits every time they use TLS for paid matters, and these credits can then be redeemed for legal services, such as court reporting, translation, e-discovery, and more. To date, more than 50 top global firms have joined the TLS Pro Bono Program, and TLS has provided legal services to over 500 pro bono cases at no charge.

To learn more about the services provided by TLS and the TLS Pro Bono Program, please visit [www.transperfectlegal.com](http://www.transperfectlegal.com).