

USPTO Patent Pro Bono Program applicant designs her way to success

Patent practitioners help financially under-resourced inventors file and prosecute patent applications.

The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) is committed to increasing inventor diversity, improving equity in the innovation ecosystem, stimulating the national economy, creating jobs, and ensuring America's competitiveness. The [Patent Pro Bono Program](#) is one of the primary tools the USPTO has to meet these goals and to ensure financially underserved communities can access the patent system. The impact of the Patent Pro Bono Program entirely depends on volunteer services from practitioners like yourself, who can directly make a difference in someone's life.

Take for example, Jermikko. A graduate from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Jermikko originally felt she had to pursue her fashion-related inventions on her own until a friend told her about the Chicago-Kent Patent Hub, one of USPTO's 21 regional not-for-profit organizations operating the Patent Pro Bono Program. At the time, Jermikko was working on a provisional application for a SwapOut Hoodie, a hooded sweatshirt with a zipper allowing its two sides to be entirely detached to "swap out" different colors for each side. Jermikko conceived the idea while shopping after overhearing a son beg his mother to buy two hoodies so he could represent his team colors. Today, it is one of her best-known designs and can be seen in a popular music video. Jermikko, who ultimately was granted patents 10,028,541 and D842,589, has high praise for the practitioners that she worked with through the Patent Pro Bono Program, who to this day remain available to answer questions.

Over the course of the Patent Pro Bono Program's 11 years, practitioners have donated over 87,000 hours, resulting in more than 1,800 patent applications being filed. Through USPTO's collaboration with 21 regional programs, financially under-resourced inventors in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have access to patent pro bono services via the organizations who screens and matches eligible candidates with volunteer registered patent practitioners. Patent protection results in increased opportunities for inventors to bring their inventions to market. The program benefits not only the inventor, but also the public, by encouraging innovation and progress.

Each year, the USPTO recognizes attorneys and firms that make significant volunteer contributions to the Patent Pro Bono Program and share the value that all inventors should have access to patent services. Past and present pro bono certificate recipients can be found on our [Practitioner Recognition webpage](#). Together, we can publicly reinforce the paramount importance of inventor diversity in the innovation ecosystem for the good of the nation as a whole. Can we count on you to be among this year's contributors?

If you are a registered patent practitioner in good standing, you are uniquely qualified to represent inventors who have no financial means to afford legal representation to file and prosecute patent applications before the USPTO. According to AIPLA President Patrick J. Coyne, "The Patent Pro Bono Program provides patent practitioners a great opportunity to assist inventors who do not have the means to afford legal services." AIPLA encourages you to volunteer through the [Patent Pro Bono Program webpage](#) or to email probono@uspto.gov with any questions that you might have.

To volunteer with the regional program in your state, click on the [map](#).