

Briefing Document

USPTO/AIA INVENTOR ASSISTANCE PRO BONO PROGRAM

Background

In 2011, Congress passed the America Invents Act (AIA), which called for the U.S. Patent Trademark Office (USPTO) to establish new satellite patent offices to be opened nationwide by 2014. As a result, Dallas, Texas will get 1 of 4 satellite patent offices, which will open in 2014. The other 3 are being established in San Jose, CA; Denver, CO; and Detroit, MI.

Texas and Southwest U.S. cities are among the top sources of new patent applications in America, with more than a quarter of these patents awarded to small businesses. So, the establishment of a satellite office in Texas is important for those businesses to continue creating jobs. Yet, one comment most often heard is that independent inventors sometimes cannot afford the cost of competent legal service to assist them in the preparation and prosecution of their patent application.

Inventor Assistance Pro Bono Program

One of the many answers to the concern of patent costs that the America Invents Act provides is the establishment of an ***Inventor Assistance Pro Bono Program***. The Inventor Assistance Pro Bono Program provides a way to offer services to inventors and small businesses that meet a certain financial need level, have done a search themselves or through a service provider, and have gone through a training package developed by the USPTO. Under the Inventor Assistance Pro Bono Program, patent attorneys and agents in regions across the country will be able to serve inventors, advancing invention-based economic development.

Pro Bono Assistance Office for Texas/South Central U.S.

The Center for Innovation, an Arlington, Texas based non-profit, has been chosen to serve as the Texas and Southwestern U.S. regional office for the Inventor Assistance Pro Bono Program as part of the AIA pro bono initiative. The actual office was staffed and opened on July 15, 2013. Our statewide launch was conducted in the Capitol at Austin September 5, 2013.

Current Status

We currently have interest in this initiative from 4 primary sectors: (1) the legal community, (2) the business community, (3) law schools and (4) the technology transfer and technology commercialization community. Our primary interest has been to identify participants from each sector that will work with the Center to assist in the development and implementation of a plan that will most effectively serve the pro bono clients, the volunteer patent attorneys/agents, and the USPTO. Participants will help lead our region in

providing volunteer resources for appropriately identified and prepared inventors, as well as excellent pro bono service opportunities for patent attorneys and agents.

To date 175 applicants have come through the Federal Circuit Bar, referred to the Center for screening. From these, 52 Pro Bono Patent program cases have been assigned to the Pro Bono Volunteer Attorney Group. Other cases will be moved forward for Pro Bono Assistance when a volunteer attorney becomes available. To date, 3 patents applications have been filed with USPTO through the Program. There are 10 members currently on the Steering Committee and 21 Volunteer Attorneys.

Steering Committee

A Statewide Steering Committee has been established, chaired by Craig Enoch, former Texas Supreme Court Justice, who is a Partner in Enoch Keever PLLC.

Members include:

Justin R. Chapa,
K&L Gates LLP

Darby Dickerson, Dean
Texas Tech Law School

Royal Furgeson, Dean,
UNT Dallas College of Law

William Hulsey, Principal,
Hulsey IP Lawyers

Wes Jurey, CEO,
Center for Innovation

Trevor Lind, Attorney,
Lee & Hayes

Ryan McCarthy, Principal
Fish & Richardson P.C.

Erik Metzger, Manager,
Intel

Ross Robinson,
Winstead PC

Senator Royce West,
West & Associates L.L.P.

Contact Information

If you are interested in being involved with the Pro Bono Assistance Program, or desire additional information, please advise the Center for Innovation. The contact information is as follows:

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Additional information is available through the Center's website:
www.thecenterforinnovation.org.