

News

Vorys, BP Partner to Sponsor Equal Justice Works Fellow

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Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease LLP and BP announced that the two organizations have partnered together to sponsor an Equal Justice Works Fellow.

The fellow, Lisa Virgen, began her two-year fellowship this month. She will be working with Lone Star Legal Aid in Houston. Virgen is focusing her work on helping low-income and immigrant populations in Houston who are underserved when it comes to tax advocacy.

"Tax law isn't something that comes to mind when people think about public interest law" Virgen said. "I'm hoping I can fill a needed gap in our community. Low-income residents face many tax issues and often don't have access to the resources to address these problems. This creates even more issues for immigrants trying to secure their citizenship."

Vorys and BP decided earlier this year to partner together in support of a fellow. After an extensive fellow review and interview process, the organizations chose Virgen. Her project focuses on advocating against tax preparation fraud and increasing access to legal tax services for refugees and immigrants. Unscrupulous notary publics and tax preparers routinely prey on immigrants who, because of cultural, linguistic, and educational obstacles, believe a notary or tax preparer can assist them with their legal issues and tax returns. When notaries and tax preparers falsify immigration and tax documents there can be devastating consequences on immigrants, including financial ruin, damage to lawful immigration status, or deportation. Virgen plans to conduct outreach to immigrant taxpayers on their rights and legal remedies through partnerships with immigration attorneys and sincere tax preparers.

"Lisa's plan was unique and it really resonated with us," said Monica Oathout, a partner in the Vorys Houston office. "She has unique plans to connect with Houston's immigrant population and help that community avoid becoming victims. We're excited to support her in this worthwhile endeavor."

Lawyers from BP and from Vorys will provide support and counsel to Virgen during her two years as a fellow, including promoting her work within their organizations, communities and the Texas Bar, and assisting with pro bono opportunities.

About Equal Justice Works: Equal Justice Works Fellows design unique projects that serve and address a range of legal issues including domestic violence, homelessness, community economic development, immigration, civil rights, juvenile justice, employment rights, health care, consumer fraud, and environmental justice. Equal Justice Works then matches the Fellow with sponsors to support their projects. To learn more, visit equaljusticeworks.org