

**Statement of Support for Proposed Amendment to the Definition of Legal Worker
by National Lawyers Guild Detroit & Michigan Chapter**

The National Lawyers Guild Detroit & Michigan Chapter enthusiastically endorses the proposed amendment to the definition of “Legal Worker” to include those whose role as legal worker is unpaid.

Our chapter has a long history of robust collaboration among attorneys, law students, jailhouse lawyers, activists and allies to further our vision of a more just society that is responsive to the will of the people. Our Legal Observer (LO) program, which provides observers to roughly 100 actions a year, is overseen and sustained by volunteers, working in conjunction with a paid coordinator, many of whom are not employed for pay in legal or paralegal roles. Many of our LOs joined the movement for liberation as activists before training as LOs, and some have gone on to serve on our Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and as chair of our LO Committee.

The presence of volunteer legal workers, including LOs, in our membership has strengthened our chapter, improved our ability to work effectively, and been integral to the success of our litigation. Volunteer legal workers are neither easier nor harder to screen for poor intent or conflict of interest than any other member.

Across the country, access to educational and employment opportunities is systematically skewed towards those in power: the affluent, white, male, cisgender and heterosexual. Requiring members of the NLG to be employed in a certain industry — particularly one with significant higher education requirements — necessarily supports that system of oppression. In addition, it elevates the importance of one’s role in a capitalist system, in an organization that is explicitly anti-capitalist.

NLG’s mission statement includes our goal to “function as an effective force in the service of the people.” We cannot serve people if we exclude them. We therefore support the addition of volunteer work to the definition of “Legal Worker”, and encourage a vote of “Yes”.

Respectfully submitted,

Naomi Zikmund-Fisher, Secretary
on behalf of the
Board of Directors
NLG Detroit & Michigan Chapter