

FIFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT PRO BONO PLEDGE

This pledge reflects the principle that members of the legal profession have an obligation to provide legal services to those who are under-represented in or lack access to the legal system. The preamble to the Supreme Court of Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct provides, in pertinent part, as follows:

It is the responsibility of those licensed as officers of the court to use their training, experience and skills to provide services in the public interest for which compensation may not be available. An individual lawyer's efforts in these areas is evidence of the lawyer's good character and fitness to practice law.

In Illinois, 14.7% of people live below 100% of the federal poverty level, and an additional 17.6% are near poverty. This is a total of over 4 million people. Within the Fifth Judicial Circuit, 32,425 people living are living below the federal poverty level, which is 19% of the total population. Three of the counties – Edgar (17%), Vermilion (18.9%), and Coles (22.9%) – have a poverty population higher than the state average of 14.7%. Yet, there are only approximately 350 full-time legal aid attorney across Illinois. Despite this drastic need and the limited resources, in 2012, legal aid funding was cut by the state twenty percent and federal funding cut fifteen percent, resulting in decreased service for low-income people in legal crisis. Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation is the local legal aid organization providing free civil legal services to the poor in the Fifth Judicial Circuit. The rapidly growing gap between the legal needs of those who cannot afford legal services and the resources available to meet the needs must be bridged, and pro bono attorneys are extremely necessary to close that gap.

Illinois Supreme Court Rule 756(f) defines pro bono as “legal services to persons of limited means; legal services to charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental or educational organizations in matters designed to address the needs of persons of limited means; legal services to charitable, religious, civic or community organizations in furtherance of their organizational purpose; or training intended to benefit legal aid organizations or lawyers who provide pro bono services.”

In recognition of the responsibility of all members of the legal profession – from corporate lawyers to law firm lawyers to solo practitioners to legal staff – to increase access to our legal system, we will:

- ❖ Encourage our attorneys and legal staff to provide pro bono legal services and in doing so provide an environment which is hospitable to the rendition of such services;
- ❖ Designate a primary pro bono point of contact within the firm or legal services program;
- ❖ Consider adopting a written pro bono policy; and
- ❖ Recognize attorneys and legal staff who participate in pro bono services, as appropriate.

Please check one of the below options that describes your commitment under this Pro Bono Pledge:

- Our law firm or corporation has a longstanding commitment to the principles of this Pro Bono Pledge and we look forward to continuing this commitment.
- Our law firm or corporation wishes to commit to the principles of this Pro Bono Pledge and will join in the efforts to increase access to our legal system through pro bono in the Fifth Judicial Circuit.
- I am a solo practitioner and have a longstanding commitment to the principles of this Pro Bono Pledge and I look forward to continuing this commitment.
- I am a solo practitioner and wish to commit to the principles of this Pro Bono Pledge and will join in the efforts to increase access to our legal system through pro bono in the Fifth Judicial Circuit.

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Our law firm or corporate legal department commits to this Pro Bono Pledge:

Law Firm/Corporation: _____

Signed: _____

Name (print) and Title: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Date: _____

ABRAHAM LINCOLN COMMITMENT

Within the Fifth Judicial Circuit, the Coles-Cumberland Bar Association has set a laudable standard for support of legal aid for those in need with its pro bono requirement of either a \$250 contribution to legal aid or the provision of 10 hours of pro bono legal services for each attorney within the firm on an annual basis. Signatories to the Pro Bono Pledge who agree to this additional obligation, the Abraham Lincoln Commitment, will be recognized for their additional commitment and dedication to supporting legal aid in their communities

- I/we pledge to annually contribute either \$250 in support of legal aid or to provide 10 hours of pro bono legal services for each attorney within the firm annually.

Designation of Pro Bono Contact for Your Law Firm or Corporate Legal Department:

- Please have someone contact me from Land of Lincoln to discuss how to best communicate pro bono opportunities to me and/or my colleagues.
- We designate the following individual as our law firm or corporation's pro bono contact:

Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Please direct questions regarding the Pro Bono Pledge or your completed pledge form to:

Fifth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee
c/o Angelica W. Wawrzynek, Chair
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