

TENTH 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.

Thirty-three percent of Illinoisans, or just over 4 million people, fall at or below 100% of the federal poverty level. Yet, there are only approximately 350 full-time legal aid attorneys 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. Locally, the Tenth Judicial Circuit Courts continue to see an increase in the number of pro se litigants in civil legal matters. Prairie State Legal Services, Inc. is the local legal aid organization providing free civil legal services to the poor in the Tenth Judicial Circuit, but they alone are unable to meet the demand for legal services.

Attorneys in the Tenth Judicial Circuit have had a longstanding history of providing pro bono legal services to those in need. This commitment is reflected in the bylaws of the Peoria County Bar Association, which states it is the responsibility of every active member to represent indigent persons in civil legal matters. The rapidly growing gap between the legal needs of those who cannot afford legal services and the resources available to meet those needs must be bridged, and pro bono lawyers are extremely necessary to closing that gap. Now is the time to build upon and enhance the strong pro bono foundation within the Tenth Judicial Circuit.

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 corporate law department;
- ❖ 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 Tenth Judicial Circuit.

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- 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 Tenth Judicial Circuit.

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: _____

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

- Please have someone contact me from Prairie State Legal Services 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:

Honorable Lisa Wilson
Associate Judge
Peoria County Courthouse
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Peoria, Illinois 61602
(309) 672-6905
lwilson@peoriacounty.org