

**ILLINOIS FORUM ON PRO BONO: THE FUTURE OF PRO BONO AND HOW YOU CAN HELP**

**ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

During the roundtable discussions, groups were invited to share ideas they had discussed to increase the delivery of pro bono legal services in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit. Several themes came out of this discussion. One central theme identified by several groups was the need to more widely share information regarding the need for pro bono, the availability of expert support and malpractice insurance, and the variety of specific opportunities to provide pro bono legal services. It was suggested that Prairie State Legal Services (Prairie State) disseminate this information in partnership with the Rock Island County Bar Association and through various social media outlets. Another recurring idea was to recruit new pro bono volunteers by making direct asks of and referrals to attorneys by groups across the community, including Prairie State, the Rock Island Bar Association and the courts. Another discussion centered on the need to formalize pro bono programs at area law firms, and to identify ways to make current programs such as the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Pledge most effective at increasing pro bono participation.

**ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION NOTES**

Below are the collective ideas and feedback on each question as recorded by each roundtable discussion group.

**I. What can be done to better recruit and support pro bono volunteers?**

- Provide education and information to local attorneys about the need for pro bono legal services and available opportunities;
- Directly ask individual attorneys across the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit to handle a pro bono matter;
- Partner with bar associations to refer cases to pro bono volunteers;
- Identify local law students with their 7-11 license, and connect them to pro bono opportunities through their law school or place of work;
- Recognize attorneys who take new pro bono cases;
- Increase pro bono participation within firms that are signatories to the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Pledge;
- Assist firms of all sizes in developing mentoring programs to partner more experienced pro bono attorneys with those who are less experienced;
- Invite local attorneys to a barbeque where Prairie State Legal Services can share information about their organization and available pro bono opportunities;
- Host pro bono-related events for younger attorneys with the Rock Island County Bar Association Young Lawyers Division; and
- Strategically use YouTube and other social media outlets to publicize the value of pro bono, and connect attorneys with pro bono opportunities.

**II. What are the barriers to pro bono for individual attorneys?**

- Fear of taking a case without adequate knowledge of legal issues involved;
- Uncertainty about the amount of time the case will ultimately require; and
- The need for income generated by clients.

**III. What are some of the pro bono challenges your law firm or corporation faces (as opposed to individuals)?**

- The lack of knowledge or experience by any firm attorneys in working on the areas of law most needed for pro bono legal services; and
- No clearly established expectations or procedures around pro bono work by associates.

**IV. What are some unique pro bono strategies that you have successfully used? What replicable models exist for successful and innovative pro bono programs/projects?**

- Proactively requesting pro bono cases in familiar areas of law to efficiently and effectively serve the self-represented litigant's needs.

**V. There is a wide range of potential volunteers within the legal community, e.g. government attorneys, senior attorneys, law students and paralegals, who are not the traditional pro bono volunteer. How do we effectively engage these groups in pro bono legal services? What partnership opportunities exist?**

- Inform and solicit retired attorneys, who may not know that malpractice insurance is provided and may not be aware of the pro bono needs in their community; and
- Target retired attorneys who participate in Rock Island Bar events.

**VI. What role could/do courts and judges have in supporting your program's efforts? Are there other individual or organizational advocates who are key to your success?**

- Establish system of judicial referrals and appointments for pro bono matters; and
- Develop a listserv of pro bono volunteers for judges to distribute pro bono referrals.

**VII. How can we engage those attorneys who are not currently involved in pro bono?**

- Offer free CLE programs, and promote them widely;
- Develop pro bono opportunities that use limited scope representation;
- Use social media to promote particular pro bono opportunities; and
- Widely publicize facts about volunteering with Prairie State, e.g. availability of malpractice insurance, pre-screened cases, limited scope representation opportunities, support of staff attorneys, etc.

**VIII. What research is needed that could help to improve pro bono delivery in Illinois and how could that research be used to develop or improve pro bono programs?**

- Develop measurements to assess the effectiveness of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Pledge;
- Identify more ways to spotlight signatories to the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Pledge; and
- Consult firms and corporations (such as Latham & Watkins and Deere & Co.) about ways to expand participation in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Pledge.

**IX. How are we recognizing the pro bono being done in our community? Are there other ways of recognition that should be considered?**

- Issue periodic news releases through Prairie State or the Chief Judge's Office to thank recent pro bono volunteers and guilt others into volunteering;
- Recognize pro bono volunteers through the Rock Island County Bar newsletter; and
- Send personalized thank you notes to pro bono volunteers, firms and corporations from the Executive Director or Managing Attorney of Prairie State.