

FIFTH Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee

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

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The Forum began with a panel presentation that explored poverty in Illinois and its connection to the need for legal assistance among low-income individuals and families, as well as ways in which increased pro bono legal services can help address those needs. Following the panel presentation, small discussions groups considered several questions that touched on the themes from the panel presentation in an effort to explore how to further expand and enhance pro bono across the circuit. While more detailed notes from those discussions are below, some key concepts discussed included: recruiting new pro bono attorneys by having Land of Lincoln or local judges directly ask attorneys to take pro bono cases; identifying a leader at each firm to manage pro bono information and work; better incentivizing pro bono; having firms provide billable credit for pro bono; developing materials to help self-represented litigants better understand the court process; and increasing education about the need for pro bono legal services and the areas in which need is the greatest.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION NOTES

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

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

- Publicize current pro bono trainings and mentoring opportunities more widely;
- Target firm leadership to be involved in, and promote specific pro bono opportunities;
- Directly contact attorneys across the Fifth Judicial Circuit to request pro bono services;
- Promote the need for pro bono and relevant opportunities at monthly bar association meetings in different counties;
- Appoint a representative at every larger firm to manage the pro bono work being done; and
- Reach out to young lawyers and advertise the opportunities to gain experience in court.

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

- The need for income generated by clients, as many private attorneys are struggling financially;
- Concerns about meeting a firm's billable hour requirement and being supported by firm management;
- Uncertainty about the amount of time the case will ultimately require;
- The challenges of managing client expectations and boundaries from the start about the terms of service and time availability, without a fee structure;

- Fear of taking a case without adequate knowledge of the legal issues involved;
- Apprehension from not being familiar with an area of law; and
- Lack of staff support for pro bono-related work, especially for retired attorneys.

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

- Easier for associates to pay the annual opt-out fee to the Coles-Cumberland Bar Association than to take on a pro bono matter;
- Inconsistent and unknown attitudes of firm leadership regarding pro bono legal services by associates; and
- The lack of a clear and formalized pro bono program and process to refer to or validate pro bono legal services.

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?

- Work with local firm management to establish a system where billable hour credit is given to associates for the Coles-Cumberland Bar Association's mandatory 10 hours of pro bono legal services; and
- Develop a list of potential pro bono attorneys for judges to appoint to pro bono cases.

V. How do you measure/evaluate the success of your firm or corporation's pro bono program? How do these measurements help you improve your program?

- Measure success by the number of pro bono cases that have been completed and the number of pro bono attorneys who have provided legal services;
- Establish and revisit future goals for pro bono participation; and
- Keep thorough and accurate time records of time spent on pro bono legal services.

VI. 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?

- Direct cases to different groups of pro bono volunteers, understanding their specific area(s) of legal knowledge, limitations and concerns;
- Draft brochures detailing the procedures involved in certain areas of law and keep them current through the pro bono and bar committees, Land of Lincoln and judges; and
- Engage government attorneys in suitable pro bono programs and events.

VII. 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?

- Judges could briefly outline or distribute written materials that detail the expected procedure at trial, when setting a pro bono case for hearing;
- Courts could develop and distribute brochures outlining the law for specific areas with pro bono needs, such as landlord/tenant, collections and family law; and
- Court-based Help Desks staffed by pro bono attorneys to provide information and assistance through limited scope representation and basic instruction sheets for taking pro bono cases in the Lawsuit and Small Claims Divisions.

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

- Communicate pro bono needs and opportunities between the Fifth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee and the area bar associations;
- Offer free CLE programs to train pro bono volunteers, and promote them widely;
- Establish a system of judicial appointments for pro bono matters;
- Support the development of formalized pro bono programs at area law firms;
- Develop a public pro bono challenge between area attorneys;
- Identify opportunities for leaders in the legal community to publicly encourage other attorneys into providing pro bono legal services;
- Develop a system of pro bono referrals between attorneys; and
- Make direct asks of potential pro bono volunteers.

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

- Widely publicize the Fifth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Celebration Dinner; and
- Identify alternative ways to incentive pro bono work for those who do not seek awards or public recognition.