



## **2015 PILI Illinois Forum on Pro Bono The Access to Justice Puzzle: Fitting the Pieces Together**

Thursday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
Chicago Bar Association

### **ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION NOTES**

A panel presentation preceded the roundtable discussions, with representatives from several public interest law organizations outlining the needs of their clients and the communities they each serve. Following the panel, discussion groups made up of a cross-section of pro bono leaders from law firms, corporations, public interest law organizations, and law schools discussed what had been presented, the scope of the need and how the legal community can collectively work together to try to better address that need. Below are the combined ideas and feedback as recorded by each roundtable discussion group.

#### **1. Discuss the needs you heard about today and how your pro bono volunteers are responding or could respond to these needs.**

- An important consideration is that pro bono programs which are bite-sized or use limited scope representation can require more resources and time from the agencies developing the programs. Law firms, corporations and agencies could partner to identify meaningful ways to recruit and incentivize pro bono attorneys to volunteer for longer-term projects.
- A significant area of legal need is in family law, and specifically parentage and divorce cases. People may not take these pro bono cases is due to the perception they will drag on for an extended period of time or require family law expertise. A solution is to engage people who practice family law in Cook County as mentors to train and help pro bono attorneys at big firms and/or who are not family law practitioners with these matters.

#### **2. What other needs exist that haven't been discussed from the perspective of those at the table and how could they be addressed?**

- The need to develop a clearinghouse for low-income entrepreneurs who own small businesses and are in need of legal assistance with contracts and regulatory compliance. Currently, The Law Project and law school clinics are the only source of pro bono support to meet these needs and there is both high client need as well as interest on the part of pro bono attorneys for this type of work.
- The seeming lack of a procedure at many firms to try to place the pro bono matters of those who depart the firm with other internal attorneys rather than referring it back to the agency. When this happens, it can leave the client and agency in a difficult position.
- The need for greater access to interpreters and bilingual attorneys, including sign language, and the fact that it is difficult to get these services on a pro bono basis. Firms might be in a position to help alleviate the costs incurred as a way to address language access issues.
- The need for low-cost or pro bono deposition transcription services as these are a significant expense for agencies. Law firms might be able to leverage their relationships with transcription firms for donated services. Law firms could lead these discussions, explain tax breaks to transcription firms, and encourage the firms to adopt internal policies where pro bono hours count towards billable hours. Law firms could also propose exchanging CLE training for transcription services.
- The need among agencies for help with professional development for their staff attorneys. Law firms and corporations could provide agencies with trainings by legal experts and access to online resources.

- The needs of unrepresented litigants in the Daley Center. Pro bono attorneys could assist at different phases to resolve cases; for example, they could assist with filing a jury demand, negotiating debt issues or help landlords understand the strict rules required to evict tenants who haven't paid rent, and drafting parenting agreements.
- The scarcity of employment opportunities for the many law students and recent graduates wanting to work for legal aid agencies who could help address the access the justice gap. Agencies can only work with so many of these law students and lawyers at a time.

**3. How can we keep the dialogue about client needs going as they evolve? How can we keep the greater community informed and help them respond?**

- Offer regular CLEs focusing on the client needs of various public interest law organizations;
- Identify the ways in which lawyers at law firms and corporations best learn about unmet legal needs across Illinois and ways to help meet that need.
- Disseminate information to Chicago attorneys about unmet legal needs and agency needs through pro bono leadership at firms and corporations.
- Provide updated poverty statistics and information about unmet legal needs on Illinois Legal Aid Online for pro bono attorneys.

**4. Was there something you heard today that was new or contrary to what you had thought previously? How does this information impact your response to increasing access to justice?**

- There is a significant unmet need for family law services in Chicago and across the state.
- In-house legal departments are interested in partnering with agencies to provide pro bono services.
- The rate of the population at or below the poverty level is the highest rate since 1960.
- The low number of public interest law attorneys outside of Cook County; and the opportunity for Chicago-area attorneys to use technology to provide legal services across the state to address unmet legal needs.

**5. Are there ways in which the broader Illinois legal community can come together to address the needs you heard today and expand access to justice?**

- Target law schools as a source for more hands-on pro bono support.
- Expand the PILI Graduate Fellowship Program so that Fellows exclusively work on pro bono matters at their law firm for an extended period of time beyond the summer.
- Create a clearinghouse for legislative reform goals of legal aid organizations, so that volunteer lawyers could pick up drafting projects and lobbying on a pro bono basis.
- Change Illinois law so that corporations and LLCs don't need attorneys to resolve matters in the municipal department of administrative hearings.