

PRO BONO LEGAL SERVICES

Background

The American Bar Association Standing Committee on Pro Bono Public Service, along with other ABA committees and sections, annually stresses the importance of pro bono work through awards, acknowledgements, and incentives. The ABA effectively lobbies – and organizes state and local bar associations to lobby – for continued federal funding for legal services.

Missouri Bar Activities

The Missouri Bar has always encouraged Missouri lawyers to be as generous as possible with their pro bono work in order to ensure that all Missouri citizens receive equal access to justice. With reduced financial resources being made available to legal services offices throughout Missouri, this obligation to serve the public has become even more important.

A recent study conducted by a researcher at the University of Missouri-Columbia concludes that the lawyers of Missouri each provide an average of 42 hours of pro bono legal help to clients and their communities each year. This translates into \$50 million dollars worth of free legal services to the poor annually.

Corporate Pro Bono Program

The Missouri Bar launched its Corporate Pro Bono Program to enable entire legal departments to work as a team on pro bono projects. The program, modeled after a groundbreaking effort in Washington, D.C., nevertheless builds on Missouri's unique legal culture that traditionally includes pro bono service as part of most lawyers' practices. The program is designed to remove barriers from corporate lawyers who want to give back to their communities by linking lawyers who want to provide pro bono services to the poor with community and charitable groups whose clients are in need of free legal services. It also links attorneys in corporate legal departments to attorneys in private firms who can provide expertise in areas of the law in which corporate attorneys may have little experience.

For more information about the Corporate Pro Bono Program, call The Missouri Bar Center in Jefferson City at (573) 635-4128 or visit the Corporate Pro Bono Program website at <http://members.mobar.org/CorpProBono/WebForm1.aspx>.

State Legal Expense Fund

A major obstacle that has prevented in-house attorneys from performing pro bono work has been pushed aside by legislation passed during 2004 and signed into law by then-Governor Bob Holden. Senate Bill 3 provides malpractice coverage through the State Legal Expense Fund for attorneys who do pro bono work for non-profit organizations, including government agencies. Although not a Missouri Bar-sponsored bill, the state bar supported the bill throughout the legislative process.

Continuing Efforts

The Missouri Bar and The Missouri Bar Foundation have sponsored various studies to assess the legal needs of the poor in Missouri and the funding that is needed to meet these needs. The Missouri Bar has also led efforts to increase funding for the four legal aid offices serving Missourians.

The Missouri Bar also recruits and recognizes volunteer attorneys in a variety of ways. The bar's major publications have featured stories on the four legal aid offices in the state and their particular need for more volunteers. Ethics programs regularly include reminders that Missouri lawyers have an ethical duty to provide pro bono services to those in need. A volunteer attorney form is provided in issues of major bar publications, and the bar annually presents awards to lawyers who have performed outstanding pro bono work. The Missouri Bar will continue to lobby for state and federal funding as well as encourage its members to volunteer and otherwise assist in the provision of civil legal services to the poor in all ways possible.