

OHIO LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

Voluntary Pro Bono Initiative

As recognized by the Supreme Court of Ohio Task Force on Pro Se and Indigent Litigants, statewide initiatives that support and expand pro bono services by the private bar will increase the availability of legal assistance to our poorest citizens. Adoption of the Voluntary Pro Bono Initiative will make a significant difference in generating greater volunteer participation and financial support for Ohio's pro bono and legal services programs.

THE VOLUNTARY PRO BONO INITIATIVE

The Voluntary Pro Bono Initiative sets forth the following voluntary, aspirational pro bono goals for Ohio attorneys:

- o Each lawyer should aspire to render at least 50 hours of pro bono services per year.
- o The substantial majority of the 50 no-charge hours should be spent by assisting persons of limited means or certain organizations that address the needs of such persons.
- o As an alternative to providing pro bono services, a lawyer can fulfill this aspirational responsibility in any given year by financial support of at least \$500 to organizations that provide legal services to such persons.
- o Each lawyer will be asked to complete a form providing information about the pro bono services rendered and/or financial contributions made as part of the attorney's biennial registration process with the Supreme Court of Ohio.

75% OF LOW-INCOME OHIOANS DO NOT HAVE LEGAL REPRESENTATION IN CIVIL MATTERS

The unmet needs of residents of Ohio for legal services in civil matters for which they are unable to pay are vast and well documented. OLAF's most recent data estimate that only one in four low-income Ohioans with a significant problem receives the assistance of a lawyer.

PRO BONO SERVICE BY OHIO ATTORNEYS REMAINS VOLUNTARY

The Voluntary Pro Bono Initiative does not impose a mandatory duty to provide pro bono service. It merely asks lawyers, through the existing biennial registration process, to include information about the number of hours engaged in pro bono activities and/or financial contributions made to non-profit organizations that provide legal services to the poor.

This reporting mechanism serves a reminder to Ohio attorneys that pro bono legal service is a vital part of a lawyer's professionalism and embodies the spirit of the aspirational goals to increase the delivery of legal services directly to low-income persons.

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Voluntary Pro Bono Initiative (continued)

THE OHIO STATE BAR ASSOCIATION, THE OHIO LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION AND THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO TASK FORCE ON PRO SE AND INDIGENT LITIGANTS FULLY SUPPORT THE VOLUNTARY PRO BONO

In May 2004, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio, in recognition of the challenges faced at all levels of the state court system to provide legal assistance for persons of limited means, appointed a 24-member task force to recommend how Ohio can improve the access of all citizens to the justice system, including meeting the civil legal needs of low-income Ohioans.

The Task Force on Pro Se and Indigent Litigants, chaired by the Honorable John Adkins and composed of judges, lawyers, county commissioners, legal aid and public defenders, representatives, members of the General Assembly, clerks of court, and a low-income consumer, issued its report and recommendations in April 2006. The Task Force, after researching strategies for more adequately meeting the civil legal needs of low-income individuals, concurred with prior recommendations of the 2004 Ohio Bench-Bar Conference, the Ohio State Bar Association, five major Ohio metropolitan bar associations, and the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation that Ohio should adopt aspirational goals of voluntary pro bono service for Ohio lawyers and establish a mechanism by which lawyers will record their service to individuals and community organizations that provide legal service to low-income individuals throughout Ohio.

THE VOLUNTARY PRO BONO INITIATIVE ENCOURAGES FLEXIBILITY

The Voluntary Pro Bono Initiative encourages lawyers to explore how they may volunteer and gives lawyers flexibility in how they may contribute toward meeting the legal needs of Ohio's low-income individuals. In addition to providing legal representation to individuals and community organizations, a lawyer may make a financial contribution to those organizations that provide services to low-income persons.

THE VOLUNTARY PRO BONO INITIATIVE WILL MEASURE THE SIGNIFICANT PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS

For the first time, the Voluntary Pro Bono Initiative provides a means to accurately measure the substantial number of pro bono hours Ohio attorneys currently provide each year. Tracking voluntary pro bono activities will demonstrate to the public in a very tangible and meaningful way the significant contributions being made and the ongoing dedication and commitment of Ohio lawyers to low-income individuals. Documentation of pro bono activities will enhance public perception of lawyers and the delivery of legal services. In states that have adopted similar voluntary pro bono initiatives, the percentage of attorneys who provide pro bono services has jumped 30-40% over previous levels, and attorney donations to support legal services have soared to more than \$2 million annually.

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