

2011 Pro Bono Month Theme and Talking Points

1. Theme

**"NOW MORE THAN EVER, PRO BONO IS
MORE THAN JUST THE RIGHT THING TO DO"**

2. Talking Points Under This Theme

a. **The need for pro bono assistance is greater now than ever.**

1. Michigan's dire economy has increased the need for legal help.
 - Over 3 million people (nearly 1/3 of all Michigan residents) qualify for free legal aid because their income is below 200 percent of federal poverty levels (about \$29,000 annually for a family of two). More than 40 percent of Michigan children live in households with income below 200 percent of poverty.
 - Foreclosure rates have increase by more than 70 percent, and 1 in every 50 kids has experienced homelessness.
 - Michigan's unemployment rate remains over 13 percent, the highest in the nation.
2. Legal aid programs lack resources to serve all who need help.
 - Nonprofit legal aid programs must turn away nearly half of all persons who request their help.
 - **With about 180 legal aid lawyers in Michigan, that is one legal aid lawyer for every 17,000 eligible low-income clients (compared with one private lawyer for every 305 persons in Michigan).**
 - Studies have shown that no more than 20 percent of the legal needs of the poor are being met. The legal problems of the poor affect basic needs like family safety, housing, health, and economic security.

b. **Lawyers are uniquely suited to provide legal help for the poor.**

1. Lawyers have an ethical responsibility to provide pro bono.
 - The State Bar's Voluntary Pro Bono Standard (pursuant to MRPC 6.1) creates an aspirational goal for each lawyer of 30 hours of pro bono service per year or a \$300 donation for legal aid. (In Michigan, pro bono includes both service and money. Lawyers who cannot provide service can meet their obligation with a donation to the [Access to Justice Fund](#); many lawyers do both.)
 - The primary focus of the Standard is on legal representation for the poor because only lawyers can provide legal assistance.

2. Lawyers receive referrals, training, and support for pro bono cases.
 - Legal aid programs, bar associations, self-help centers, and other groups have formal pro bono programs to help lawyers help others.
 - Lawyers can provide pro bono service in many ways. In addition to donations or traditional in-court representation, lawyers: give advice in clinics and hotlines, give information to pro se patrons at self-help centers, handle impact litigation and policy advocacy, conduct legal educational sessions for the community, mediate legal disputes, provide transactional legal assistance to nonprofit organizations, and help train other lawyers to help the poor.

c. **Pro Bono is more than just the right thing to do.**

1. Pro bono legal service improves the administration of justice.
 - Pro bono gives access to justice to those with nowhere else to turn.
 - Pro bono improves the public perception of the legal profession and assists the operation of the courts which otherwise face even more self-represented litigants.
2. Pro bono makes business sense for lawyers and law firms.
 - Clients care about whether law firms are good corporate citizens.
 - Pro bono programs often provide training and malpractice coverage for their volunteers.
 - New lawyers and smaller firms develop skills through pro bono.
3. Pro bono services help our communities.
 - Helping a domestic violence victim prevents injury and costly medical expenses and alleviates overworked law enforcement.
 - Helping a family keep its home prevents homelessness and decreases the burden on shelters and other charitable and government services.
 - Helping a worker prevent wrongful loss of job or wages allows individuals to put food on the table and pay their rent.
 - Keeping a child in school reduces truancy and juvenile crime and saves court time and incarceration costs.
 - Helping create a guardianship protects a child without going through the dependency system, easing the court/county burden.

3. Uses for Theme & Talking Points (Consistent Messages in All Communications)
 - a. Proclamation
 - b. Press releases
 - c. Op-eds and letters to the editor
 - d. Content for local/other speeches on pro bono
 - e. Pro bono fast facts sheet
 - f. Content for flyers advertising pro bono month events
 - g. Website content