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To: Pro Bono Initiative  
From: Robert Mathis  
Date: December 1, 2014  
Re: Pro Bono Month 2014 Final Report

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## Background

- **History of Pro Bono Month**

For the sixth year in a row, the State Bar of Michigan (SBM) Pro Bono Initiative (PBI) sponsored Pro Bono Month in conjunction with the American Bar Association's (ABA) Pro Bono Week celebration, a national recognition of pro bono activities. In 2005, Pro Bono Week was first celebrated in Chicago and has since become an annual occasion, celebrated across the United States. In 2009, in an effort to facilitate an increased focus on a wide array of pro bono activities, the decision was made by the PBI to extend Michigan's Pro Bono Week into Pro Bono Month. The pro bono celebration is an opportunity to recruit more pro bono volunteers, increase legal services to the poor, mobilize community support for pro bono, foster collaborative relationships, and recognize and publicize the pro bono efforts of Michigan's lawyers.

- **Need for Pro Bono**

Pro Bono Month highlights the need for pro bono, and pro bono is needed more now than ever because at no time in recent memory has the divide been wider between the need for legal services and their availability. Michigan's dire economy has increased the need for legal help. From 2000 to 2011, Michigan's poverty population eligible for free legal aid increased 59 percent. More than 25 percent of Michigan's children under the age of 18 live in poverty. Michigan also remains among the top 10 states with the highest number of foreclosures and highest unemployment rate.

Making matters even worse, Michigan's nonprofit legal aid programs suffered about a 20 percent cut in funding and related staff reductions from 2010-2012. In 2012, there was one lawyer for about every 300 people in the general population, but only one legal aid lawyer for every 21,073 persons in Michigan living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In Michigan, there are nearly 3 million low-income residents who qualify for legal aid.<sup>1</sup> That is approximately one of every three Michiganders. These low-income families include:

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<sup>1</sup> LSC programs use federal income eligibility limits (125 percent of the federal poverty level) to determine income eligibility, which also includes clients with household incomes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty levels with certain eligible expenses.

- retirees on fixed incomes;
- veterans who have been denied benefits;
- survivors of domestic violence;
- neglected children;
- immigrants;
- the working poor;
- persons with disabilities;
- laid-off workers; and
- many others who struggle daily for survival, independence, and dignity.

During Pro Bono Month and throughout the year, the SBM asks its members to give back to their communities by providing pro bono legal services to the poor<sup>2</sup> as only lawyers are qualified to do. Under the SBM's Voluntary Pro Bono Standard, every year each lawyer is asked to take three cases, donate 30 hours or contribute \$300 (\$500 for those attorneys whose income allows) to support legal aid through the Access to Justice Fund (ATJ).

As the State Bar's Voluntary Pro Bono Standard illustrates, in Michigan, pro bono involves both service and money. Making a donation to the ATJ Fund is a way for lawyers who are not able to provide service to meet the pro bono standard. But many lawyers generously give both service and money, which is wonderful because the need for both is so great these days. Since 1997, the ATJ Fund has raised more than \$12 million to support a statewide network of nonprofit legal aid programs.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, in a recent pro bono report, the SBM found that Michigan lawyers take seriously their obligation to provide significant pro bono legal services and contribute financially to legal aid programs. Michigan attorneys reported doing pro bono for a broad range of reasons including personal satisfaction, assuring access to justice, and connecting with local legal aid programs. Many Michigan attorneys have found that pro bono offers the opportunity to work with a wide variety of clients one may otherwise not encounter, thereby enhancing communication skills and building confidence for inexperienced lawyers. Attorneys in private practice have found that pro bono service leads to paying clients and is an important part of a successful client development plan. Many attorneys have also discovered that providing pro bono legal services enhances their reputation within their firm, within the profession, and within their community. Of the Michigan attorneys that were surveyed, 66 percent reported doing some pro bono work, 30 percent reported making donations for legal aid programs, and many reported doing both.

Despite the generosity and commitment of Michigan's pro bono attorneys, more help is needed to help those in need of civil legal aid. Michigan's legal aid programs lack the resources to serve all who need help, and because of insufficient resources must turn away

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<sup>2</sup> The PBI defines "poor" as individuals and families with incomes at or below 200 percent of Federal Poverty Guidelines and with liquid assets below \$5,000.

<sup>3</sup> The Access to Justice Campaign is a partnership of the State Bar of Michigan, the Michigan State Bar Foundation, and Michigan's nonprofit civil legal aid programs to increase resources for civil legal aid for the poor in Michigan.

nearly half of all persons who request help, which is why pro bono legal services are so important during Pro Bono Month, and throughout every other month of the year.

- **State Bar of Michigan Planning Process**

The 2014 Pro Bono Month workgroup met frequently to plan and coordinate pro bono events throughout Michigan.

The 2014 Pro Bono Month workgroup included:

- Marilyn Hackett, Legal Services of Eastern Michigan
- Heidi Naasko, Pro Bono and Diversity Counsel—Dykema
- Kim Paulson, Pro Bono Counsel—Bodman
- Linda Rexer, Executive Director—Michigan State Bar Foundation
- Amy Sankaran, Director of Externship and Pro Bono Programs—University of Michigan Law School
- Justin Sheehan (Workgroup Chair), Statewide Program Manager—Michigan Community Resources
- Amy Timmer, Associate Dean of Students and Professionalism—Thomas M. Cooley Law School
- Candace Crowley, Assistant Executive Director—State Bar of Michigan
- Robert Mathis, Pro Bono Service Counsel—State Bar of Michigan
- Benjamin Ensroth, Law Student Intern—State Bar of Michigan

## **Project Objectives**

The goal of the Pro Bono Month workgroup was to have substantial recognition of Pro Bono Month 2014 by the diverse members of Michigan’s legal community. This was done through raising awareness, publicizing and streamlining efforts, and overall statewide collaboration.

Pro Bono Month 2014 was an opportunity for attorneys to take part in events to educate the public and the legal profession about pro bono. To recognize Michigan’s dire economic climate and an even greater need for legal services for the poor, the workgroup determined that the theme for Pro Bono Month 2014 would continue to be “now more than ever—pro bono is the right thing to do.” The workgroup had several objectives for Pro Bono Month 2014, including raising overall awareness of the Pro Bono Month and increasing opportunities for members of the legal community to get involved.

To facilitate in the promotion of Pro Bono Month, the SBM encouraged events throughout the Pro Bono Month season, which included the months of August through November. The PBI aggressively publicized Pro Bono Month events on the PBI Pro Bono Month website that were sponsored by organizations all across Michigan, including, but not limited to, legal services organizations, bar associations, law schools, law firms, and solo practitioners.

## **Key Developments**

1. There were 75 Pro Bono Month 2014 events held throughout Michigan during the Pro Bono Month 2014 season. Additional Pro Bono Month event information can be viewed by visiting the SBM Pro Bono Month website.<sup>4</sup>
2. The 2014 John W. Cummiskey Award, established in the name of John W. Cummiskey of Grand Rapids, a leading advocate and activist in the cause of making legal services available to all, without regard to economic status, was presented to Susan Kornfield of Bodman at the SBM Annual Awards Banquet to recognize Susan's significant pro bono contributions.
3. At the October 22 Pro Bono Coordinator Breakfast for Detroit-area law firms, staff announced the upcoming launch of the Patent Pro Bono Project. This project will provide pro bono legal assistance to low-income clients in need of help in patent cases. The Project will formally launch on November 18 at an event at the USPTO Satellite Office in Detroit.
4. To highlight the exceptional pro bono efforts of attorneys throughout the state, the PBI, in conjunction with the workgroup, published many [A Lawyer Helps](#) stories throughout the Pro Bono Month season. These stories included two in memoriam stories about Michael Chielens and Holli Wallace, who both posthumously received the Michigan State Bar Foundation Access to Justice Award.
5. Michigan Governor Rick Snyder signed a proclamation declaring October 2014 as Pro Bono Month.

## Other Events During the Pro Bono Month 2014 Season

Events held throughout Michigan in recognition of Pro Bono Month 2014 included:

### September

- 1-30 Michigan Legal Help Law Student Pro Bono Trainings
- 2-16 Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Probate Legal Clinic
- 2-25 Common Ground Legal Clinic
- 5-29 PPO Affidavit Assistance Project
- 9 Free Legal Advice Clinic—Barry County Bar Association and Barry County United Way
- 10 MentorJet "Speed Networking" at University of Detroit Mercy School of Law
- 11 Oakland County Bar Association—Senior Law Day  
Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Legal Clinic

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.michbar.org/probono>

- 12, 14 Pro Bono Institute—University of Michigan Law School
- 17 Grand Rapids Bar Association—Constitution Day
- 17 State Bar of Michigan Awards Banquet
- 24 NALS of Lansing Monthly Legal Education Seminar
- 26 Veterans Stand Down Macomb  
Wayne Law Pro Bono Presentation
- 29 Fraser Trebilcock lunch for LSSCM Friends of Legal Aid Committee

**October**

- 1 MSU Chance at Childhood Self-Help Center  
Eastern District of Michigan Chapter of the Federal Bar Association—“State of the Court” Luncheon
- 2 Michigan Community Resources—16<sup>th</sup> Annual Event & Awards Ceremony
- 2-30 MSU Housing Clinic—Eviction Diversion Program
- 3-31 PPO Affidavit Assistance Project
- 6 SBM UP Tour—Lunch with Chippewa County Bar Association  
MSU Chance at Childhood Self-Help Center  
SBM UP Tour—Reception with Delta County Bar Association
- 6-10 2014 Michigan Poverty Law Program Roadshow
- 7 SBM UP Tour—Breakfast with Menominee County Bar Association  
SBM UP Tour—Lunch with Dickinson County and Iron County Bar Associations  
Oakland County Bar Association—Pro Bono Month Legal Aid Mini Clinic  
SBM UP Tour—Cocktails and Dinner with Gogebic Ontonagon Bar Association  
Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Legal Clinic
- 7-21 Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Probate Legal Clinic
- 7-30 Common Ground Legal Clinic
- 8 Labor and Employment Pro Bono Civil Litigation Training Seminar  
SBM UP Tour—Lunch with Copper County Bar Association  
SBM UP Tour—Reception with Marquette County Bar Association  
Grand Rapids Bar Association—3Rs Program
- 8-9 Southeast Michigan Veterans Stand Down Homeless Veterans Court
- 9 Ingham County Ask-a-Lawyer Day

- Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Legal Clinic
- 13 MSU Chance at Childhood Self-Help Center
- 14 WLAM and WCBA—Bias Awareness Luncheon  
Oakland County Bar Association—Pro Bono Month Legal Aid Mini Clinic  
Free Legal Advice Clinic—Barry County Bar Association and Barry County United Way
- 15 LADA Free Outreach Clinic  
U of M Law and MCR—Working as an Attorney in a Nonprofit
- 16 Floyd Skinner Bar Association Scholarship Reception  
Washtenaw County Bar Association—Bias Awareness Dinner
- 17 Mason Lake Bar Association Pro Bono Month Presentation
- 20 2014-2015 SBM Justice Initiatives Kick-Off  
WMU Cooley Law School Pro Bono Pledge  
Oakland County Bar Association—Pro Bono Month Legal Aid Mini Clinic  
Ask A Lawyer Night—Saginaw County Bar Association, Legal Services of Eastern Michigan, Public Libraries of Saginaw
- 22 Oakland County Circuit Court—Pro Bono Recognition Breakfast  
Pro Bono Coordinator Breakfast  
MSU Chance at Childhood Self-Help Center  
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center and Detroit Immigration Court—Model Hearings at the Detroit Immigration Court for Pro Bono and Nonprofits
- 23 Saginaw County Bar Association—Pro Bono Appreciation Lunch  
Vlachos & Vlachos and LAWM—John N. Vlachos Award
- 24 Legal Advice Clinic—Saginaw County Bar Association, Legal Services of Eastern Michigan  
MSU Tax Clinic—Small Business Taxes: Guidance for Veterans and Active Military Service Members  
Ask the Lawyer Day—Genesee County Bar Association, Legal Services of Eastern Michigan
- 25 Military Ave. Christian Legal Aid Clinic—Monthly Free Legal Consultation  
Free Wayne County Child Support Help Program
- 27 Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Legal Clinic
- 29 Ford OGC, Dykema, and Michigan Community Resources—Community Partnership Program—Nonprofit Compliance Review Clinic and Program Kick-off
- 30 Legal Aid of Western Michigan—Presentation of the Michael Barnes Award

## November

- 3-21 PPO Affidavit Assistance Project
- 4-18 Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Probate Legal Clinic
- 4-20 Common Ground Legal Clinic
- 5 MSU Chance at Childhood Self-Help Center  
Grand Traverse-Leelanau-Antrim Bar Association—Annual Fall Dinner
- 7 MSU LITC—State Opportunities Showcase
- 7-8 2014 Veterans Expo
- 8 Grand Rapids Student Bar Association of WMU Cooley Law School—Barristers’ Ball  
Charity Event
- 11 Free Legal Advice Clinic—Barry County Bar Association and Barry County United Way
- 12 Grand Rapids Bar Association 3Rs Program
- 13 Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Legal Clinic
- 14 MSU Chance at Childhood Self-Help Center
- 17 U of M and MSU LITCs—Pro Bono Day for Tax Court Docket Call
- 18 LADA Pro Bono and Community Awards Ceremony  
Launch of SBM Patent Pro Bono Panel Program  
Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Legal Clinic
- 20 Ingham County Bar Association—Award Recipients and 120th Annual Dinner
- 21 MSU Chance at Childhood Self-Help Center
- 24 Kalamazoo County Bar Association—Free Legal Clinic

## Observations

This was the sixth year the Pro Bono Initiative undertook the task of planning Pro Bono Month. Pro Bono Month continues to grow, and 2014 was the most successful Pro Bono Month in terms of events planned and posted on the State Bar’s Pro Bono Month website, which included 75 events throughout Michigan. Moving forward, pro bono events held in October, as well as all other months of the year, will be posted to the Pro Bono Month website, highlighting the need for pro bono service throughout the year to help ensure access to justice to Michigan’s low-income residents.

It is suggested that the PBI continue to promote Pro Bono Month. As more members of Michigan's legal community become aware of Pro Bono Month, Pro Bono Month season will continue to be increasingly successful in recruiting more pro bono volunteers to provide legal services to Michigan's poor.

***“Access to justice is a dream. We must make it a reality.”***

***—John W. Cumiskey***