

State Bar of Michigan | 2016-2017 COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Article VI § 6, Bylaws of the State Bar of Michigan

No later than May 1 of each year, the chair of each committee and sub entity of the Bar, with the assistance of the staff liaison, shall report to the Executive Director on a form provided by the State Bar on the activities and accomplishments of the committee or sub entity.

Justice Initiatives: Pro Bono Initiative

Jurisdiction: Encourages and coordinates free or discounted fees for civil legal services.
Pro bono service is a way that Michigan attorneys assist low-income individuals in need of legal assistance.

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P28106 Robert L. Willis, Jr., Southfield

State Bar Liaison

P32078 Candace A. Crowley, Lansing
P66868 Robert G. Mathis, Jr., Lansing

Committee Meeting Schedule:

Please attach any additional information needed regarding Committee meetings as an addendum.

**Please keep meeting descriptions brief.*

Meeting Type	Date	Location
Meeting Type Teleconference	June 16, 2016	
Description Regular Quarterly Meeting		
Meeting Type Teleconference	September 15, 2016	
Description Regular Quarterly Meeting		
Meeting Type In-Person / Teleconference	October 10, 2016	SBM
Description PBI meeting held in conjunction with the 2016-2017 Justice Initiatives Kick-Off at the SBM.		
Meeting Type Teleconference	December 15, 2016	
Description Regular Quarterly Meeting		
Meeting Type		
Description *A teleconference was originally scheduled for March 16, 2017, but was rescheduled to April 20, 2017, to accommodate several PBI member and staff scheduling conflicts.		
Meeting Type		
Description		

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Resources provided by the State Bar of Michigan in support of committee work:

The State Bar of Michigan provides the Pro Bono Initiative (PBI) with staff support and an initiative budget to facilitate projects and meetings.

SBM liaisons to the PBI are Candace Crowley and Robert Mathis. Jennifer Williams (administrative assistant), Eisha Vatsal (legal intern), and Jeffrey Barker (law student intern) provide additional staff support to the PBI and its numerous programs.

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Committee Activities:

The PBI has numerous committees and workgroups, including:

1. ABA Day (Governmental Relations)
2. Assessment of Pro Bono in Michigan Report and Implementation
3. ATJ Fund Eligible/PBI Approved Organization—Application Review
4. Circle of Excellence—Yearly Application Review
5. Homelessness Workgroup
6. John W. Cummiskey Pro Bono Award
7. MI-LAPP Malpractice Insurance for Pro Bono Administration
8. MI-LAPP Patent Pro Bono Project Administration
9. MI-LAPP Tax Pro Bono Program Administration
10. MI-LAPP QDRO Pro Bono Panel Program Administration
11. Online Pro Bono/ MI Free Legal Answers Workgroup
12. Celebrate Pro Bono Month
13. Pro Bono Reference Manual/Law Related Organizations Search Database
14. Spring Pro Bono Workshop
15. Veteran Resources Workgroup

The 2016 John W. Cummiskey Award was presented to attorney Leo Goddeyne of Miller Canfield at the SBM awards dinner at the SBM Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids. The award included a \$3,000 donation to an ATJ program to be made through the Access to Justice Fund. Leo asked that the award be designated to Legal Aid of Western Michigan.

Nominations for the 2017 John W. Cummiskey Award will be reviewed and a nominee identified in April 2017.

The Eighth Annual October as Pro Bono Month Celebration occurred in 2016, which included more than 50 events throughout Michigan during the Pro Bono Month 2016 season. The Pro Bono Month website included a list of upcoming pro bono month events, talking points, a sample speech, and many other resources. Looking forward to 2017, the work group wants to continue to increase the number of pro bono events and the promotion of the need for pro bono legal services for the poor. The work group will also explore expanded collaboration with law firms, attorneys, and LSPs on pro bono events.

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder signed a proclamation declaring October 2016 as Pro Bono Month.

The Ninth Annual October as Pro Bono Month is set for October 2017.

The State Bar's "A Lawyer Helps" website continued to highlight the good work of many Michigan attorneys, with 15 stories posted on the website in 2016. "A Lawyer Helps" focuses first on the legal profession's priority of pro bono—free legal help for the poor and financial donations to help nonprofit legal aid agencies. But "A Lawyer Helps" also honors lawyers who additionally volunteer time to other efforts that benefit their communities. Please visit <http://www.michbar.org/alawyerhelps> for information on how to submit stories for inclusion on the website.

2016 was another successful year for MI-LAPP's QDRO Referral Program. In 2016, the program closed more than 50 QDRO cases and received 57 cases referred to the QDRO program by Michigan legal services providers. The great success of the program in 2016 was due in very large part to the program's dedicated volunteer drafters. In 2016, the program's volunteers included Joseph Cunningham, Robert (Bob) Treat/QDRO Express, Nancy Keppelman, David and Jackie Roessler, and John Mooney. Each QDRO case that is prepared by a drafter, on average, requires four hours to complete. MI-LAPP continues to rely on the leadership of the QDRO Administration Committee, spearheaded by Joseph Cunningham of Joseph W. Cunningham JD, CPA, PC and Bob Treat of QDRO Express LLC.

Expansion of the MI-LAPP Malpractice Insurance Program continued. Lawyers without malpractice insurance coverage are encouraged to apply for coverage through the State Bar/MI-LAPP Malpractice Insurance Program. Lawyers that accept cases from ATJ & non-ATJ programs without their own malpractice insurance are eligible to request coverage. In 2016, the MI-LAPP malpractice insurance program provided coverage to attorneys for 10 pro bono cases ranging from patent law to landlord/tenant issues. In each of the circumstances where malpractice coverage was provided, if not for the malpractice insurance program, the attorneys would have probably not been to offer pro bono legal services due to their lack of malpractice insurance.

The Eighth Annual Spring Pro Bono Workshop, "The Power of Pro Bono," occurred on May 24, 2016. More than 55 people attended the workshop, including pro bono attorneys and representatives from various legal aid agencies. The special guest speaker was State Bar of Michigan Executive Director, Janet Welch. The evaluations from the workshop were all very positive, with all attendees reporting that they would attend the 2017 workshop.

Future Goals and Activities:

Most of the project work described in this report occurs annually, and efforts will be directed to replicating and improving those projects. In the coming year, the PBI will continue efforts to improve the delivery of pro bono services to the poor throughout Michigan.

Other Information:

The Ninth Annual Spring Pro Bono Workshop is slated for May 23, 2017 at the State Bar building. The workshop sessions are designed to encourage interactive discussions, with increased opportunities for attendees to network to discuss strategies for increasing pro bono legal services in Michigan.

The 2016 Circle of Excellence has appeared in the Michigan Bar Journal multiple times throughout 2016. For the 2016 Circle of Excellence, which considers service and donations made in 2015, there were more than 50 firms and corporations on the Circle. The 2016 COE also included the Leadership and Excellence Levels, which recognized firms whose aggregate financial contributions reflect \$300 and \$500 per lawyer, respectively. The COE was also redesigned in 2016 to more easily identify those firms qualifying for the Leadership Level. In March 2017, personalized letters were mailed to law firms that have previously appeared on or applied to the COE. The letters, which included a message from SBM President Larry Nolan, were intended to advise firms of the 2017 COE applications, due on April 7, 2017.

Tax Pro Bono Referral Panel Program. On Tuesday, June 21, 2016, attorneys participated in the fourth annual program training. The training was offered via webinar. There are currently more than 100 attorneys on the Tax Program's pro bono panel. The program opened 27 case in 2016. Another tax training webinar is slated for June 27, 2017.

The implementation of Limited Scope Representation (LSR) in Michigan was a recommendation that of the State Bar's 21st Century Practice Task Force. At its September 2016 meeting, the Representative Assembly approved, by an overwhelming majority, proposed court and ethics rule amendments which would allow more meaningful LSR in Michigan. The proposal was the product of an unbundling work group appointment by Lori Buiteweg at the end of the June 2016, JI Summit on unbundling. The work group was chaired by PBI member, Linda Rexer.

The Patent Pro Bono Project continued to grow throughout 2016, receiving more than 70 total requests for assistance. The Patent Project has been able to place 17 low-income inventors with patent pro bono attorneys to assist in patenting their inventions. The Patent Project currently only accepts clients that meet income (at or below 200% of federal property guidelines) and asset (less than \$5,000 in liquid assets) guidelines and have filed a provisional application with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. There are currently other pro bono and clinical programs in Michigan that provide assistance to a limited number of clients needing services beyond what the Patent Project is currently able to provide. As the Patent Project expands, the Patent Project's Steering Committee may consider accepting clients needing assistance beyond what is currently offered.

Robert Mathis attended the 2016 ABA Equal Justice Conference in Chicago, along with Wendy Richards (Michigan Community Resources). Erika Davis attended the Access to Justice Chair's meeting on behalf of the CJI.

The Michigan Legal Help website (michiganlegalhelp.org) continued to help people handle simple civil legal problems without a lawyer. The website features articles for people to learn about a specific area of the law and toolkits to help them prepare for self-representation in court. Some forms available on the website are completed automatically once simple questions are answered. The Michigan Legal Help website does not provide legal advice, and it is not intended as a substitute for having a lawyer. PBI members applauded MichiganLegalHelp.org as an incredible service that has proven to be very helpful for people that cannot afford an attorney and cannot get assistance from an LSP. MLH is also now available in Spanish.

The Pro Bono Reference Manual continues to offer the searchable Michigan Law Related Organizations Search function which allows users to search by legal service area and county. The information in the search function is verified and updated frequently by SBM staff.

The Homelessness Workgroup continues to research and determine what legal resources are available for Michigan's homeless, what barriers currently exist that prevent the homeless from accessing legal services, and suggest strategies for overcoming these barriers. The workgroup will continue to focus its attention on the coordination of efforts between pro bono lawyers and the existing legal services programs in each of the different areas of the state.

The SBM/PBI partnered with Legal Services of Eastern Michigan and the Genesee County Bar Association to plan and roll-out of the "MI Free Legal Answers" pro bono website in Genesee County. More information about this project is provided in the Online Pro Bono Workgroup Ad Hoc Committee report.

The Veterans Resources Workgroup was formed in late 2016. Workgroup members include Khalilah Spencer, Wendy Richards, Peggy Costello, Heidi Naasko, Ashley Lowe, Michele Hall, Todd Morgan, Daphne Cunningham, Jeff Barker, and Robert Mathis. The workgroup is looking at how legal services for veterans can be more effectively coordinated in Michigan.

At the 2016 SBM Annual Meeting, representatives from the PBI (staff and members) help staff a booth to promote the work and programs of the PBI. The PBI booth also provided a video presentation promoting recent "A Lawyer Helps" stories and law firms and corporations that qualified for the 2016 COE.

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Approved by	Approved	Name
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Co-chair		
Staff Liaison		
Other		

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