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To: Committee on Justice Initiatives  
From: Dionnie S. Wynter  
Date: December 9, 2009  
Re: Pro Bono Month Final Report  
Cc: The Pro Bono Initiative and Candace Crowley

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## Background

The State Bar of Michigan (SBM) and the Pro Bono Initiative (PBI) collaborated and celebrated Pro Bono Week 2009 in conjunction with the American Bar Association's national recognition of pro bono activities. Pro Bono week was first celebrated in Chicago and has become a national, annual occasion. It is an opportunity for attorneys across the country to plan events in recognition of individuals who currently do pro bono work and to encourage others to do the same.

A workgroup was formed at the December 2008 meeting of the PBI. The group was charged with planning and coordinating events in recognition of Pro Bono Week 2009. The workgroup, in an effort to facilitate increased focus on a wide array of pro bono activities, made the decision and extended **Pro Bono Week** into **Pro Bono Month**. The workgroup focused its efforts on law firms, legal service providers, and members of the legal community in encouraging them to partner with the PBI and celebrate Pro Bono Month 2009.

The workgroup included Margaret Costello, Dykema Gossett; Heidi Naasko, Dykema Gossett; Mark Fancher, American Civil Liberties Union; Nicholas Gorga, Honigman, Miller, Schwartz and Cohn LLP; Hon. Denise Page Hood, United States District Court Eastern District of Michigan; Kirsten Enstice, Diocese of Kalamazoo; and Michael Bryce, University of Detroit Mercy School of Law.

## Project Objectives

The goal of the workgroup was to have substantial recognition of Pro Bono Month 2009 by Michigan law firms, corporations, legal service providers, and all other members of Michigan's legal community. This was done through raising awareness, publicizing and streamlining efforts, and overall state-wide collaboration.

Planning for the month-long celebration was accomplished in two phases. Phase one consisted of a comprehensive coordination effort where agencies state-wide were encouraged to plan an event in recognition of Pro Bono Month. This effort was accomplished by utilizing resources at the State Bar of Michigan, including collaboration

with sections, *Michigan Bar Journal* articles, the launching of a webpage, and daily updates to the American Bar Association website of state-wide efforts. Phase one spanned ongoing efforts to publicize Pro Bono Month. Each workgroup member was assigned an area of the state and was required to contact agencies within that area directly and inform, encourage, and offer assistance with any event they wanted to plan for Pro Bono Month.

Phase two was a capstone event at the Hall of Justice on October 29, 2009. The purpose of this social event was to recognize all the participants of Pro Bono Month 2009. Professor Peter Edelman of Georgetown Law School was guest speaker. Judge Cynthia Stephens, co-chair of the Committee on Justice Initiatives, hosted the event, while Supreme Court Justice Diane Hathaway gave welcoming remarks.

## Key Development

On September 18, 2009, the governor of Michigan signed a proclamation declaring October as Pro Bono Month 2009.

## Related Projects

The following agencies participated in the recognition of Pro Bono Month 2009:

1. The Hispanic Bar and the Detroit Bar hosted Pro Bono Law Day.
2. Pro Bono lawyers celebrated Constitution Day in Berrien County.
3. The Genesee County Bar featured October as Pro Bono Month in its newsletter.
4. The Wolverine Bar Association and Legal Aid and Defender Association hosted an expungement clinic.
5. The United States District Court Eastern District held a Foreclosure Prevention Training.
6. The Kalamazoo County Bar Association hosted two free clinics.
7. University of Detroit and the Pro Bono Initiative hosted a “*Project Salute*” training aimed at helping veterans with their benefits.
8. Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Auburn Hills campus, held numerous events including a foreclosure prevention training and offered services at the Pontiac Senior Center.
9. The Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Grand Rapids campus, held a Teen Court.
10. Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Lansing campus, offered free legal services at Open Door Ministries. In addition, the law school extended their Service to Soldiers clinic.
11. The Saginaw County Bar Association, in cooperation with Legal Services of Eastern Michigan, held three free legal education seminars in the areas of family law, estate planning, and landlord and tenant.

12. Legal Services of Eastern Michigan held a senior legal advice clinic and a legal advice clinic.
13. The Saginaw County Bar Association and Legal Services of Eastern Michigan held a Pro Bono Appreciation Lunch where honored guests received the traditional pro bono gold, silver, or bronze reward.
14. The Kalamazoo County Bar Association, the Diocese of Kalamazoo Immigration Assistance Program, and the Michigan Immigrant Rights Project held a free naturalization clinic.
15. The Washtenaw County Bar Association hosted a road show.
16. Beaumont Hospital hosted a free reception where they introduced a new pro bono program, "Legal Aid for Children."
17. Hubbell Duvall PLLC expanded their efforts in recognition of Pro Bono Month to establish a bankruptcy clinic at a Detroit law school.

## **Observations and Recommendations**

This was the first year the Pro Bono Initiative undertook this endeavor. Pro Bono Month was well received and appreciated by the legal community. This was evident from the number of programs that were held state-wide, the involvement of the governor, and the community of interest that was built at the Hall of Justice concluding event.

While this is a decision for the Pro Bono Initiative to make, staff recommends that we recognize and celebrate Pro Bono Month again in 2010.