

DIALOGUE

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From the Chair...

By A. Michael Pratt

Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service

Thanks to all for a successful second annual National Celebration of Pro Bono. For the second year, over 600 events were held in almost every state and territory. Over two-thirds of these were direct service clinics, CLE and training programs, or recruitment events, all of which resulted in increased services to our most financially distressed and vulnerable citizens.

Building on last year's success, the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service focused on broadening and deepening participation in the 2010 Celebration by encouraging every participant and sponsoring entity to think strategically about local needs, local programs, and local issues, and then to plan and take the next steps in providing access to justice to poor and vulnerable people in their area. The growing participation of pro bono attorneys has become both an integral and indispensable part of the delivery of legal services to poor people. Ongoing efforts to expand critical representation to the growing numbers of people living on the social margins depend heavily on the involvement of volunteer lawyers; the Celebration of Pro Bono provides an annual opportunity to advance the pro bono enterprise significantly.

The week owes its resounding success to hundreds of lawyers, law students, paralegals, administrative staffers, and the organizations for whom they work, who took yet another step on the road to equal justice for all. We are grateful to everyone who puts their knowledge, talent, and passion to work for justice every day and appreciate those who utilized the National Celebration of Pro Bono to expand civil legal services for those in need.

Just after the conclusion of the Celebration we surveyed participants to get their insight on why the Celebration is important to them. When we asked if the National Celebration of Pro Bono helps advance their local pro bono agenda we were told:

- "Our local attorneys like to know that they are part of a nationwide effort to recognize and increase pro bono representation."
- "It has developed new local leaders that support the program throughout the year. It has also served to educate both the public and our local government leaders about the need for access to justice and the pro bono efforts of the bar. It has led to the development of new service delivery components. By all measures it has been a benefit to our pro bono efforts in the state."
- "It helps us organize with other pro bono agencies to get the word out to the legal community."
- "It puts a spotlight on the work we do and helps us to get coverage in the local media."
- "I think events like this help focus on the satisfaction of pro bono work and make the attorneys proud of the volunteer work that they do. It also provides them with social exposure to the Judges whom they usually only interact with in the Court setting."
- "It's a great way to shine a spotlight on things that are happening the other 51 weeks of the year, to celebrate those who are giving back year round, and to also draw more lawyers in."

We also wanted to know how groups used the Celebration to improve and increase access to legal services for their clients. The responses we received, including the following, reflect the care and thought that was given to this issue as groups went forward with their Celebration planning. For example:

- We held 21 clinics throughout the state that provided direct client services. This was a significant increase over last year. We expect that some of these clinics will continue on a regular schedule throughout the year.
- We organized several significant recruitment events during pro bono week that increased participation and as a result expanded service to clients.
- We used the celebration as a way to challenge local bar associations and organizations to plan a specific event to train lawyers to reach more clients, host a clinic to help clients, host a reception/awards ceremony to honor the good work done by lawyers in their community or host a public education event to provide relevant legal information to targeted groups (immigrants, the elderly and their caregivers, etc.).

The Pro Bono Committee is working on evaluating the 2010 Celebration and the overall National Celebration of Pro Bono initiative. As we explore our plans for the future, we could use your input on the following questions:

- Should the initiative continue to be called the National Celebration of Pro Bono or would some other name work better for you in your planning, promotion and implementation efforts at a local level? What suggestions do you have?
- To avoid conflicting events and a planning process that was too intense in 2009, five states converted the Celebration week into a month-long series of events. Would you find it useful to have the Celebration promoted as a month-long initiative?
- How can the ABA be more helpful from a national perspective as you plan for your 2011 activities?

Please email your responses to Steven Scudder, Committee Counsel at scudders@staff.abanet.org.

Thank you for your commitment to pro bono and for understanding the value of the National Celebration of Pro Bono. The Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service stands ready to help you throughout the year as you work to develop new pro bono projects and improve existing ones. For more information, visit our website at www.abaprobono.org.

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