Nominations are now being sought for the 2002 ABA Pro Bono Publico Awards—the preeminent pro bono awards within the American Bar Association. The Pro Bono Committee is seeking nominations of individual attorneys who do not earn their income delivering legal services to the poor. Large and small law firms, corporate law departments, government attorneys offices and other institutions in the legal profession whose members have collectively made an outstanding contribution toward one of the award’s criteria are also eligible. Not more than five awardees will be selected.

Nominations must be received by March 11, 2002. Award recipients will be notified no later than April 29, 2002. The awards will be presented at the Pro Bono Publico Awards Assembly Luncheon on August 12, 2002, at the ABA Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. For more information about the awards, the nomination criteria and instructions on submitting a nomination, please visit the Pro Bono Committee’s Web site at www.abaprobono.org or call Dorothy Jackson at (312) 988-5766 to obtain a copy of the Pro Bono Publico Awards brochure.

**Help us showcase the pro bono efforts of lawyers of color.** Hispanic, Asian, Native American and African American lawyers provide pro bono services in their communities and we want to recognize nationally these efforts. For too many years, the work of attorneys of color, who serve often outside of the traditional pro bono organized system, has gone unrecognized. For example, these lawyers often provide pro bono legal services in their church, for a local youth group, or to senior citizens. We need you to nominate and encourage others to nominate a lawyer of color or a minority law firm in your community to receive the 2002 American Bar Association Pro Bono Publico Awards.

**ABA Establishes Ann Liechty Pro Bono Award**

The Pro Bono Committee is pleased to announce that the Board of Governors Operations and Communications Committee recently approved its request to designate one of the current five Pro Bono Publico Awards, “The Ann Liechty Pro Bono Child Custody Pro Bono Award.” Ms. Liechty was a lawyer from a two-person firm in Billings, Montana who received one of the Committee’s Pro Bono Publico awards in 1998. She was recognized for her unstinting efforts to provide pro bono legal services benefiting children in adoptions and child custody matters. Unfortunately, Ms. Liechty died of cancer shortly after receiving the award.

To honor the memory of their niece and support the legal work she valued so highly, Ms. Liechty’s aunt and uncle, Melita and Bill Grunow, gave just over $1,000,000 to the ABA Fund for Justice and Education. They targeted the gift to support the Pro Bono Child Custody Project, a joint initiative of the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service and the Family Law Section. The Project began in late 2000. The Pro Bono Committee sees this award as a way to ensure that an individual lawyer, practicing in the legal area that is most common for pro bono programs, is recognized each year.
Pro Bono Work Still Integral Part of 1991 Award Recipient’s Practice

Solo practitioner Manlin Chee describes herself as “not a formal person.” You won’t find a desk in her Greensboro, North Carolina office, but instead an armchair, and other pieces of furniture that create a living room atmosphere. Since she started her private practice in 1984, she has always configured her office like this. She wants to make sure her clients feel comfortable when they meet with her, comfortable enough to offer all the information she needs to provide them with top-notch representation. Their comfort level dictates how thoroughly Ms. Chee will be able to understand their needs.

In a curio cabinet in the office sits the ABA Pro Bono Publico Award Ms. Chee received in 1991. She was recognized and chosen as a recipient for her extensive pro bono work through the Greensboro Pro Bono Project on guardianship, domestic and public benefits cases, as well as other pro bono work done through various other organizations (e.g. refugee issues related to asylum, deportation and children). Ms. Chee’s caseload has not changed since she received the award—she still takes numerous pro bono cases as part of her practice.

Ninety-five percent of Ms. Chee’s clients are immigrants, as is Ms. Chee herself. She came to the United States in 1969 as a foreign college student. She graduated from Guilford College in 1972, married an American citizen in 1973, achieved permanent resident status in 1974, then began law school at Wake Forest in 1975. She and her husband have three children, all girls, ages 24, 15 and 12. She gave birth to her first child while in law school and has fond memories of the infant sleeping under her desk during class.

Anyone who heard Ms. Chee’s acceptance speech at the 1991 Pro Bono Publico Awards luncheon will remember being inspired by her philosophy about lawyers and lawyering. She believes that a lawyer’s ability to give access is critical not only to an orderly society, but also to an individual’s level of hope. Ms. Chee believes that where there is no access to justice, there is chaos; where there is no justice, there is no hope. Her father, a third generation general practitioner physician in Singapore, taught her this tenet as it pertains to medicine and Ms. Chee later came to discover its application to the law. Unfortunately, Ms. Chee was unable to share her pro bono award with her father because he died before the award was given.

Ms. Chee says that some of the nicest things that have happened to her in her life have come about through her non-paying clients. For example, a child returned to her and said that she really helped him and his family and that now he is going to medical school. This, Ms. Chee believes is her tie to eternity—pro bono work that will resonate for years and years, long after her death. The satisfaction she gets from a pro bono case is like a wonderful payment. When she learns later that her work had a reverberating effect, it is like receiving that wonderful payment again.

Child Custody Pro Bono Project

The ABA Child Custody Pro Bono Project, launched in late 2000, is now well underway. The project is addressing the critical needs of children in proceedings involving adoption, divorce, parentage and private guardianship. The project’s director and advisory committee have developed a Project Statement governing a minimum five-year period, which can be viewed at the project’s website, www.abachildcustodyproject.org. The project has established ten primary activities for 2002. Two of those are the Child Custody Resource Library and the Child Custody Pro Bono mini-grants.

The Child Custody Resource Library is a compilation of documents, catalogued into 34 topics, covering custody issues in general, as well as specifically in adoption, divorce, parentage and private guardianship.

The project also is interested in financially supporting efforts to add or expand pro bono representation of children in adoption, divorce, parentage, or private guardianship cases. The project will make its first round of mini-grants shortly. The goal is to increase the number of children who will receive pro bono representation in these cases this year and in coming years. The project will support programs with a proven expertise that lends itself to this work, thus, giving preference to programs that currently provide: (1) pro bono child custody representation to children; (2) pro bono representation to children in other areas and are committed to expanding to custody cases; or (3) staff-only representation to children in custody cases and are committed to adding a pro bono component. Requests for Proposals are currently available on the web.

For more information on these activities, contact Linda Rio at 312-988-5805 or lrio@staff.abanet.org.

Manlin Chee
Rural Pro Bono Project Mini-Grants

The Center for Pro Bono has awarded six mini-grants for 2001 to rural legal services groups as part of its Rural Pro Bono Project, an initiative designed to improve the delivery of pro bono legal services to impoverished rural Americans. “Historically, because of the critical shortage of lawyers practicing in rural areas, pro bono legal services providers have not adequately served the nation’s rural poor,” said Robert N. Weiner, chair of the Pro Bono Committee. “Through these mini-grants, the Rural Pro Bono Project is building new model programs. These programs use community partnerships and innovative technology to link urban and rural pro bono lawyers with impoverished residents in rural areas. We hope that this approach will increase access to justice in these traditionally overlooked areas.” The mini-grants, ranging in size from $4,000 to $13,500, were awarded to the following six programs that funnel legal resources to the rural poor.

- **Legal Services of Eastern Michigan** - The program will partner with local libraries, pro bono lawyers, and human services agencies to expand legal services to poor people in rural areas. At local public libraries, clients will access materials on the legal services Web site with instruction from librarians trained by pro bono lawyers. The effort will include free use of fax machines and document review.

- **Nebraska Appleseed** - The mini-grant will help support Nebraska Appleseed’s Equal Justice Clearinghouse, located online at www.NeEqualJustice.org, by providing for targeted, intensive outreach and training among rural practitioners and rural residents. Staff will work with lawyers living in Sidney, Wayne, and McCook counties. Partners include the Nebraska State Bar Association, the Nebraska Association of Trial Attorneys, Nebraska Legal Services, law school clinics, and community-based organizations across the state.

- **Equal Justice Center, Texas** - The mini-grant will help improve rural poultry workers’ access to the system of justice in northwest Arkansas and northern Alabama. The grant will be used to help educate immigrant poultry workers about their employment rights and how they can use the legal system to protect those rights, and to recruit pro bono lawyers and provide them with training and backup resources.

- **Oregon Law Center** - The mini-grant will be used for rural community summits to enhance current pro bono programs, strategize about new pro bono delivery models, and build a cooperative network of community and legal services providers within the rural areas. The summits will involve multiple counties and multiple service providers including solo practitioners, law firms, judges, judicial representatives, bar representatives, and other community providers such as shelters and domestic violence programs. Also involved will be the Oregon State Bar and other legal service providers.

- **Neighborhood Legal Services, Pennsylvania** - The mini-grant will support the development of a broad-based private bar volunteer program to serve the rural population in 10 counties. Pro bono facilitators will work with local judges and bar leaders to formulate and implement plans for creating or expanding pro bono programs. Plans will include strategies for recruitment, training, mentoring, recognition, court accommodation, screening and referral procedures, and follow-up/evaluation procedures.

- **Central California Legal Services and San Francisco Bar Association Volunteer Legal Services Program** - The mini-grant will help develop an urban-to-rural partnership to expand the capacity of Central California Legal Services by tapping into the volunteer lawyer base of the San Francisco Bar Association. Rural residents will gain greater access to legal services in a number of areas including economic development, immigration and consumer matters including bankruptcy and tax benefits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit. Volunteer lawyer referral, standardized intake forms, lawyer support, and case acceptance protocols will be established between the urban and rural partners.

For more information, contact Claire Parins at (312) 988-5774 or parinsc@staff.abanet.org

2002 Equal Justice Conference

Pro Bono Award alumni, we invite you to attend the 2002 Equal Justice Conference in Cleveland, Ohio on April 18-20, 2002. This year the conference focuses on the role we must play as leaders to work toward securing a better future—for clients, for programs and staff, for the courts, for the legal profession and for society. The conference will explore the partnerships that must be created, the resources that must be tapped, and the new issues facing clients. These discussions will take place in the context of a changing society—one seeking to respond effectively and appropriately with threats to our clients’ personal and economic security while working to expand the opportunities for all to prosper. For the fourth year, a special session will be held, the Partners for Justice Forum, on the morning of Friday, April 19. This will offer a unique opportunity for leaders to share ideas and strategies about what each segment of the profession can do to expand their own access to justice initiatives using the full resources of the private bar.