

## **Earning CLE While Helping the Less Fortunate**

*By Jaime Ackerman*

Attorneys in all jurisdictions are encouraged to help the less fortunate by engaging in pro bono work. Many state bars currently offer extra incentives for attorneys to represent indigent clients by permitting attorneys to obtain CLE credits for performing pro bono training and representation. States that presently award CLE credit for participation in approved pro bono work include Mississippi, New York, Wyoming, Washington, Colorado, Delaware, Minnesota, and Tennessee.

### **Mississippi Offers CLE Opportunities to Guardians ad Litem**

To address the shortage of certified guardians ad litem in Mississippi's courts, the Child Advocacy Committee of the Young Lawyers Division of the Mississippi Bar recently began a program to respond to this concern while offering CLE credit for participants. The Child Advocacy Committee teamed up with the Mississippi School of Law and the Mississippi College School of Law to create a guardian ad litem training video. The training DVD is approved for six hours of CLE credit.

All Mississippi attorneys are eligible to participate in this program. Copies of the training DVD can be obtained from the Chancellors in each judicial district. After watching the video, an attorney must certify that he viewed it, understood its contents, and that he or she agrees to abide by the rules governing guardians ad litem. The attorney is then placed on the list of lawyers who are willing to serve as a pro bono guardian ad litem on one case during the calendar year.

Attorneys remain on this list for one year from the date of their affidavit. Guardian ad litem accreditation and CLE credit may be obtained for using this training once per year.

### **New York Pro Bono Partnerships**

New York attorneys can earn up to six CLE skill credits for approved pro bono work. One CLE credit can be obtained for every five hours of pro bono representation. New York recognizes a wide range of organizations as authorized pro bono providers, which call for legal services in areas ranging from the arts to family law.

One authorized provider in New York is the Pro Bono Partnership. The Partnership represents nonprofit organizations in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. To obtain CLE credit, work must be performed for a New York organization. The Partnership provides its clients with legal advice on a broad range of complex business matters, including contracts, real estate, employment law, fundraising, intellectual property, environmental law, fundraising, compliance with state and federal regulations, and corporate structure and governance. By providing free representation to these nonprofits, the organizations can concentrate their focus, and their limited funds, on helping the needy in their areas.

### **Washington State Community Legal Services Opportunities**

The Washington State Bar Association permits its attorneys to obtain CLE credit for volunteer work approved by pro bono service providers, such as Community Legal Services. A total of six CLE credits can be obtained per year for pro bono work. Two credit hours per year can be obtained for training and four credits can be earned for actual pro bono services rendered through an approved provider.

Community Legal Services offers CLEs to provide substantive legal training to its volunteers. Available courses include landlord/tenant law, elder law, family law, representing low-income tenants facing eviction, and basic civil procedure.

### **Wyoming Offers CLE Credit for Pro Bono Representation and Mentoring**

In Wyoming, up to three CLE credits per year can be obtained for representation or mentoring pro bono activities that have been approved by the Wyoming Pro Bono Organization. One credit hour is awarded for every five billable hours of pro bono representation in civil actions. Credit also can be obtained for mentoring other attorneys and law students.

## American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division *The Affiliate*

Wyoming Pro Bono Organization attorneys are assigned to mentor younger attorneys at the beginning of the pro bono representation. The mentor is not required to enter an appearance in the case, but rather is available to the main attorney handling the case to provide guidance and advice on all aspects of the representation. One CLE credit is assigned per case, up to a total of three credits per year. Similarly, up to three CLE credits can be obtained for mentoring law students who have completed at least four semesters of study at an accredited law school through their pro bono representation.

To obtain CLE credit, the attorney must obtain a letter from the Wyoming Pro Bono Organization that certifies the number of credit hours earned from the representation.

### **Using CLE as an Incentive to Pro Bono Work**

Granting CLE credit for pro bono hours will be up to your state bar, but consider how your affiliate can use CLEs to promote pro bono work for the poor. Whether your affiliate provides free CLEs for pro bono training or you lobby for CLE credit for qualified pro bono hours, continuing legal education credits can provide a great incentive to help the poor and underserved in your community.

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