

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division  
*The Affiliate*

## Serving Our Seniors During the 2010–2011 Bar Year

*By Justin L. Heather*

The ABA YLD has an new and exciting public service project for the 2010–2011 bar year: [Serving Our Seniors](#). *Serving Our Seniors* provides volunteer-attorneys with the tools to assist low-income seniors with the essential elements of a basic estate plan.

### **The Need**

Our senior citizens are one of our most vulnerable and unrepresented populations. Many seniors face critical economic and health decisions without the financial ability to engage counsel to advise them regarding their options. Further, many seniors simply lack an understanding of the importance of basic estate planning, including advance health-care directives. Seniors also are often the subject of fraud and abuse and require legal assistance to consider and implement a basic estate plan to protect themselves and their estates.

Approximately half of our senior citizens have neither a living will nor discussed end-of-life decisions with their children. A recent study by MetLife concluded that elder financial abuse costs senior citizens approximately \$2.6 *billion* annually. Seniors need legal advice and guidance in order to understand the importance of basic estate planning and to complete the necessary documentation in order that their wishes will be observed at critical times in their lives.

*Serving Our Seniors* is designed to fill this need. The primary goals of *Serving Our Seniors* are to educate seniors about their estate planning options and empower them to take steps now to plan for their future and protect themselves from being victims of fraud and abuse. With the help of its affiliates, the ABA YLD will address the estate planning needs of our low-income senior population through the *Serving Our Seniors* program.

### **The *Serving Our Seniors* Program**

The ABA YLD, along with the Chicago Bar Association Young Lawyers Section, the Chicago Bar Foundation, and Illinois Legal Aid Online, developed *Serving Our Seniors* based on a clinical project created by the Center for Disability and Elder Law. *Serving Our Seniors* provides a comprehensive multi-media package including educational outreach, training, and implementation materials designed to empower ABA YLD affiliates to provide low-income seniors with basic estate plans

The materials in *Serving Our Seniors* address estate planning documents such as a power of attorney for health care, a power of attorney for property, a living will, and simple wills. Comprised of multiple videos and a training and implementation manual, *Serving Our Seniors* provides volunteer attorneys with the tools necessary to educate and assist low-income seniors in the development and creation of a basic estate plan.

### **Answering the Need**

The ABA YLD will roll out *Serving Our Seniors* in October at the ABA YLD Fall Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This implementation will be one of the many efforts by the ABA YLD to showcase the *Serving Our Seniors* program, including during each ABA YLD meeting during the 2010–2011 bar year.

The ABA YLD needs the assistance of its affiliates and attorneys across the nation to successfully implement *Serving Our Seniors*. The program videos and manual provide general estate planning information, including sample forms, as well as some basic research on estate planning for each state. These materials, however, require state-by-state licensed attorneys to ensure that the estate planning materials comply with state-specific requirements.

Young lawyers, including estate-planning lawyers, from each jurisdiction are necessary to ensure successful implementation of *Serving Our Seniors*. The ABA YLD hopes that every ABA YLD affiliate can work with area legal aid organizations to implement *Serving Our Seniors* in their respective jurisdictions. For the upcoming bar year, the ABA YLD intends to implement *Serving Our Seniors* in at least twenty-five different jurisdictions, but cannot do so without the help of its affiliates and young lawyer members.

With the help of its affiliates, the ABA YLD hopes to reach thousands of low-income seniors who are in dire need of these basic estate-planning documents. *Serving Our Seniors* allows affiliates to have a direct and substantial impact on the

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lives of low-income seniors in their areas. Without the assistance of ABA YLD affiliates and young lawyers, the legal needs of one of our most vulnerable and unrepresented population will go unmet. Please consider helping to serve our seniors during the upcoming bar year.

If you would like to be involved in *Serving Our Seniors* or for more information about the program, please contact Justin Heather, the Senior Advisor for the *Serving Our Seniors* program, by e-mail at [Justin.Heather@skadden.com](mailto:Justin.Heather@skadden.com) or by phone at 312/407-0637.

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