

Christine F. Murphy  
Application for Stephen B. Saltz Scholarship  
Temple American Inn of Court  
November 22, 2006

One of an attorney's most important responsibilities is her ethical duty to provide free legal service to the poor and to organizations that serve those of limited means. The ability to traverse the legal system deftly is both a talent and honor, and attorneys must be mindful of opportunities to provide assistance to those unable to pay for legal advocacy. A dedication to public service reflects well on law firms, corporations, law schools, individual attorneys, and the profession as a whole; but even more than the benefit of enhanced reputation, pro bono service provides opportunities for personal and professional growth that should not be taken lightly. Indeed, in addition to providing much-needed legal services to those of limited means and lending credibility to the profession, pro bono work can foster teamwork and camaraderie among attorneys and broaden attorneys' opportunities for work outside their regular fields.

Although the Model Rules of Professional Ethics require every attorney to provide at least 50 hours per year in pro bono service, a 2005 survey by the ABA found that only 46% of attorneys met this goal, while two-thirds of respondents reported doing some level of pro bono work.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, 93% of the respondents felt that pro bono work is important, and most lawyers reported deriving a great deal of personal satisfaction from providing pro bono service.<sup>2</sup>

The level of enthusiasm for engaging in pro bono work would rise, according to the survey, if attorneys had more time, employer support, and training.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a profession-wide effort is needed if the total amount of time spent on pro bono work is to increase. Law schools can play an integral part in instilling in young lawyers a dedication to public service through a growing trend toward hiring public interest coordinators and even establishing pro bono requirements. Young lawyers who are already in the habit of providing free legal advocacy may inspire their employers to provide more support and training for pro bono work.

The ABA survey suggests that attorneys are influenced by their personal connections to pro bono opportunities, indicating that up to 49% of lawyers receive their pro bono work through recommendations from friends and family.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, 70% of lawyers who engaged in pro bono work cited a sense of duty and personal fulfillment as the most significant motivating factor in their decisions to engage in pro bono work.<sup>5</sup> Lawyers who currently do not meet the ABA's recommended 50 hours of annual pro bono work might be inspired to increase their public service if asked to do so by friends and family, or if their employers encouraged them to locate personally satisfying projects.

As attorneys, we are fortunate to have received the benefit of extensive training and developed valuable skills that are highly useful to the general public, especially those

---

<sup>1</sup> The ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service, *Supporting Justice: A Report on the Pro Bono Work of America's Lawyers* 4, 13 (2005) (available at <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/report.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 17.

who cannot effectively advocate for themselves or pay for legal assistance. With these skills comes an expectation that we as lawyers will use our training for the good of others, including those of limited means. By encouraging young lawyers to start early, providing support and training for attorneys of all ages, and encouraging attorneys to engage in personally fulfilling projects, the legal profession as a whole can provide more and better pro bono services.