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New comprehensive ABA report details lawyer involvement in providing pro bono services

CHICAGO, April 26, 2018 — Results from a comprehensive survey by the American Bar Association released today show that 4 out of 5 attorneys believe that pro bono services are important although finding the time to provide free or low-cost legal services to the needy and charitable groups remains the biggest challenge for many.

The new study, “Supporting Justice: A Report on the Pro Bono Work of America’s Lawyers,” represents the fourth of a series — and first since 2013. The survey reached out to more than 50,000 attorneys in 24 states, seeking data in such areas as their interest, time spent and key influencing factors related to pro bono work to determine how the culture of volunteering manifests itself in the legal profession.

The survey asked lawyers about their pro bono activity during 2016 as well as their most recent pro bono experience, using a definition that tracked pro bono in [Rule 6.1](#) of the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct. The survey then asked about motivations and attitudes as well as public service activity. Rule 6.1 defines pro bono as free legal service to the poor and organizations serving the poor and substantially reduced-fee work for such groups, as well as civil rights, civil liberties, public rights, charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental and educational organizations.

The results showed that 81 percent of attorneys believe that pro bono services are important and that most lawyers perform some type of pro bono work during their career. Just over half of the attorneys surveyed had provided some pro bono legal services in 2016, with a lack of time cited most often as the single most important

challenge to pro bono participation. Just over half of the attorneys providing pro bono services did so on a limited scope basis, meaning their efforts were directed at specific tasks or services. Approximately 20 percent of surveyed attorneys reported that they had never provided pro bono legal services.

“The [2017 Justice Gap Report](#) of the Legal Services Corporation found that 86 percent of the civil legal problems reported by low-income Americans received inadequate or no legal help,” ABA President Hilarie Bass said. “Legal services programs, with their limited resources, are able to provide assistance in only half of the matters brought to them. So the justice gap is real. Private attorneys play a critical role in addressing these legal needs through pro bono legal services. This new ABA report helps to better understand pro bono in a comprehensive way and will allow us to develop more effective strategies to better meet the legal needs of the poor.”

The report will be discussed at the upcoming [Equal Justice Conference](#) in San Diego May 10-12. The conference is co-sponsored by the [ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono & Public Service](#), which issued the report along with an affiliate, the ABA Center for Pro Bono. The other co-sponsor of the San Diego conference is the National Legal Aid & Defender Association.

“This is the most recent in a series of surveys to poll lawyers in every practice area, in every practice setting and of every age and experience level about their pro bono activity,” said George (Buck) T. Lewis, chair of the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono & Public Service and a lawyer at Baker Donelson in Memphis, Tenn. “It is influential in informing strategies to encourage pro bono work and to develop new pro bono opportunities with the goal of increasing access to the legal system.”

The full report can be read [here](#).

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