

Report Highlights Effect of Pro Bono Legal Services

Nashville, Tenn. – The Tennessee Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission's recently released annual report shows Tennessee attorneys are donating more than 500,000 hours of their time annually worth more than \$100 million.

For the calendar year 2014, nearly half of all attorneys reported doing some kind of pro bono work. The report shows 7,615 attorneys practicing in Tennessee provided 568,170 hours of pro bono, an average of over 74 hours per reporting attorney. The value of these services is estimated to be over \$113 million. Pro bono is a Latin term meaning "for the public good." As of December 31, 2015, 42 percent of the 18,322 active attorneys licensed in Tennessee with a primary address in Tennessee reported participating in pro bono activity during 2014. The report relies on data collected in 2015 for work performed in 2014.

The majority of these hours (68 percent) were provided to persons of limited means without a fee or at a reduced fee. The second highest category of service was to non-profit organizations serving persons of limited means without a fee at 14 percent of the total hours. Access to Justice Commission Chair Marcy Eason, a Chattanooga attorney, emphasized the growing number of methods attorneys use to make legal help available.

"We are pleased with the many ways attorneys provide pro bono legal assistance to those in need, and we look forward to expanding and growing Access to Justice initiatives under our strategic plan," Eason said.

The report shows that the number of hours of pro bono service volunteered by government attorneys in Tennessee has increased in recent years. The Supreme Court recommends attorneys provide a minimum of 50 hours of pro bono legal service each year, and the average number of hours per reporting government attorney now exceeds that at nearly 52.

The report highlights the Supreme Court's Pro Bono Recognition Program, which honored nearly 500 attorneys and law students in 2015 for providing 50 or more

hours of pro bono legal service. Attorneys provide pro bono service in a variety of ways, including volunteering at legal clinics and mediation centers, providing legal services at a free or reduced rate to those in their local or spiritual community, acting as a continuing legal education instructor, and serving on bar association committees.

The variety of projects attorneys participate in that provide free and reduced-rate legal services to those in need in Tennessee has expanded in recent years. Some highlights:

- • The Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland has established a Medical Legal Partnership with Mercy Community Healthcare in Williamson County.
- • The Washington County Bar Association reported serving nearly 300 clients through its monthly legal advice clinic.
- • Law offices are contributing to the pro bono initiative by adopting pro bono policies and becoming Pillar Law Firms to handle specific types of matters through referrals from Legal Aid.

Further, the Commission recently adopted its 2016 Strategic Plan for improving access to justice in Tennessee. “The Commission is excited to announce our strategic plan’s goals for the next two years,” said Eason. “The Commission appreciates the positive leadership of the Tennessee Supreme Court and is encouraged with our growing access to justice partnerships throughout the state.” The plan includes implementing a strategy to have 10 new court kiosks across the state, developing a statewide communications plan with legal aid and access to justice programs, and growing the Tennessee Faith and Justice Alliance to include representation from a variety of faiths. The Commission also makes recommendations to the Supreme Court of projects and programs necessary for enhancing access to justice, especially for self-represented litigants. “The Tennessee Supreme Court is committed to advancing Access to Justice initiatives across Tennessee,” said Justice Cornelia Clark, the Court’s liaison to the Commission.

“This strategic plan builds upon prior successes and seeks to increase access to the courts through faith and justice alliance programs, plain language forms for self-represented litigants, and greater public awareness of legal resources.” The

Tennessee Supreme Court announced its Access to Justice campaign in 2008 and subsequently created the Access to Justice Commission, which is composed of 10 members from across the state. The Commission is a response to a growing legal-needs gap in Tennessee for indigent and working-poor families.

See the full Pro Bono Report and more information about the Access to Justice Commission and the 2016 Strategic Plan. Legal resources provided by or partnering with the Access to Justice Commission:

- TN.FreeLegalAnswers.org
- JusticeForAllTN.com
- Help4TN.org

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[Table of Contents](#)

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