

BY MARGARET WRENN HICKEY

Providing legal services to people who cannot afford them brings meaning to what we do.



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WWW.WISBAR.ORG/PROBONO

PRO BONO OPPORTUNITIES IN WISCONSIN

Wisconsin lawyers are uniquely qualified to help close the justice gap and we have an ethical obligation to try.

Pro bono service also helps to strengthen your existing skills, exposes you to new areas of law, and helps you network with other professionals.

Explore the State Bar of Wisconsin's Pro Bono Portal for links to pro bono opportunities statewide. Visit www.wisbar.org/probono.

Pro Bono: Make a Big Impact by Doing Something Small

A few hours' pro bono assistance from a lawyer can make a huge difference for individuals struggling with seemingly insurmountable legal issues.

Pro bono work is part of lawyers' professional obligation. It can seem challenging to choose a way to help. However, providing legal services to people who cannot afford them brings meaning to what we do.

The pro bono cases on which I've worked often involve helping a client solve a problem that would have been insurmountable without a lawyer's aid. This might include navigating a divorce action across state lines, helping obtain public benefits that had been denied repeatedly, or assisting with a probate issue. In each representation, I am reminded why I went to law school – to help others.

While most lawyers solve problems daily, we typically do so for those who can afford our services. Vast numbers of potential clients go unrepresented. The ABA reported in 2016 that more than 80% of civil legal needs go unmet. Because of time and resource limits, Legal Action of Wisconsin and other agencies must turn away over half of the potential clients seeking help. Even if every lawyer in Wisconsin accepted a few pro bono cases per year, all unmet civil legal needs would not be met.

But this is not a reason to give up. Consider ways to volunteer that work for your schedule and skills. For example, many courthouses have pro bono clinics that are open for an hour or two per day or per week. Lawyers who volunteer at these clinics need not have training in the areas for which the clients seek help because there are often assistants who can help with resources. At the Milwaukee Justice Center, law students assist each attorney in research on cases, which might involve landlord and tenant, small claims, family law, or probate matters. There are also one-day events, such as Wills for Heroes, Law Day events, and expungement clinics. Each of these are ways to fulfill pro bono service without committing to a full case.

The State Bar of Wisconsin's Board of Governors will lead the way by staffing a legal-advice clinic in conjunction with the June board meeting in Milwaukee. This will be held on June 13 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the House of Peace in Milwaukee. Join us if you can! The Milwaukee Justice Clinic also offers online assistance (via videoconference) for rural clients around the state. Learn more at <https://law.marquette.edu/assets/community/pdf/mvlc-rural-flyer.pdf>.

Regardless of the pro bono activity you engage in, please give generously of your time to assist those who cannot afford to hire an attorney. If you need ideas, go to the State Bar website at www.wisbar.org/probono. It is likely that you will get more from the experience than you expected by doing pro bono work. **WL**

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