

November 1, 1996

Dear Attorney:

I am writing to ask for personal assistance in helping to solve a serious problem faced by this court and our legal community. There is a rapidly growing number of poor San Francisco residents who cannot get the legal help they need with family law problems. The local legal aid office is able to accept only a fraction of the financially eligible clients who contact them with domestic problems. The result is that even urgent legal needs are going unmet.

As the Family Law Judge for the San Francisco Superior Court, I urge all attorneys to help improve this situation. If each of you agrees to accept one or two pro bono family law cases a year, the burden of any individual attorney will be small.

We are fortunate in San Francisco to have a well-organized pro bono referral system through the Bar Association of San Francisco's Volunteer Legal Services Program. Attorneys with family law experience can accept pre-screened clients directly through VLSP's "No-Fee" Family Law Panel. Under this system, volunteer attorneys are contacted on a rotating basis for VLSP's staff who describe the cases of several low-income clients. You are free to accept or reject a particular case depending on your areas of interest and workload.

Attorneys with no family law experience are encouraged to attend VLSP's Family Law Training Clinic. At the Clinic, volunteers receive and complete practice materials, including forms. After the instruction, the expert attorneys discuss the cases of several pre-selected VLSP clients who need help with family law problems. Volunteers choose a case which interests them and conduct a first client interview on the Clinic premises. The expert attorneys remain available to assist volunteers for the duration of the case. (A schedule of upcoming clinics is attached).

All attorneys who accept cases, whether through the No-Fee Panel or the Clinics, are covered by VLSP's \$1 million malpractice liability insurance policy, which affords primary coverage to the volunteer and any employer.

VLSP clients also qualify for waiver of court fees and costs and free depositions.

Please let me know how you can help by completing and returning to me the attached form. If you have any specific questions about the VLSP, please contact Jane Lee at the Bar Association offices (415)267-0765. Thank you in advance, for responding to the urgent needs of our low-income residents.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas J. Mellon  
Judge, Family Law Department  
San Francisco Superior Court