Pro Bono Speech Material

The concept of providing access to civil legal justice without cost is fundamental to the culture of the legal profession and has long been viewed as an ethical responsibility of attorneys – both formally and informally – since the beginning of the profession. Pro Bono recognizes the volunteer service of lawyers to provide justice for all. This is the essence of what is meant by the term "pro bono publico" (for the public good).

According to a report issued by the American Bar Association ("Supporting Justice II - A Report on the Pro Bono Work," February 2009) most attorneys do not look for pro bono opportunities – the opportunities find them.

- The need for legal aid in Alabama is dire. More than 940,000 Alabamians live in poverty.
- Alabama ranks 51st below even Puerto Rico in spending for legal aid (from all sources) to the poor. Studies show that spending currently stands at less than \$10 per person compared to a national average of \$23 per person.
- Last year nearly 3,000 Alabama lawyers donated 5,000 hours of free legal services to assist the poor and disadvantaged.

Unlike the criminal defense system, the constitutional guarantee of funding for low-income Alabamians who need civil legal assistance has not yet been met. Last year one in every four households living at the federal poverty level was confronted with a legal problem.

- Only about 16% of these legal problems were resolved.
- More than two-thirds of LSC clients are women—most of them mothers. The legal problems faced by those living in poverty can have serious, long-term consequences for children, and as a result, for society as a whole. Generally, cases which will enable clients to obtain "basic needs" such as food, shelter, medical care, and freedom from domestic violence have the highest priority.
- A recent survey shows that 48% of low-income households in Alabama experienced one or more legal issues in 2006. The majority of these civil problems included:

Consumer issues (creditor harassment, utility non-payment, bankruptcy)
Health issues (Medicaid, government insurance, nursing home)
Family law issues (divorce, child support/custody, abuse)
Employment issues (unemployment benefits, pension, lost job)
Housing issues (unsatisfactory repairs, foreclosure, eviction, poor living conditions)

• The Alabama State Bar has launched two statewide initiatives to provide legal services at no cost. One project, "Wills for Heroes" is coordinated through the Volunteer Lawyers Program and provides estate planning documents free of charge to first-responders (police, fire and emergency medical personnel). The second project is a collaboration between ASB and Legal Services Alabama – the Mortgage Foreclosure Assistance Hotline which has already saved more than 3,000 homeowners from losing their home.

If you are seeking help you can call: Alabama State Bar Volunteer Lawyers Program 1.888.857.8571 Birmingham Volunteer Lawyers Program (205) 250-5198 Legal Services Alabama 1.800.403.4872 or 1.877.393.2333 Mobile Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers program (251) 438-1102