



# MY OPINION

**BY BOB BLACK**  
PRESIDENT, STATE BAR OF TEXAS

## Helping Hands

**T**his holiday season, let's remember low-income Texans and their families who may need some form of legal help but don't have the means to afford it. More than 6 million people in Texas qualify for legal aid, meaning a family of four that lives on less than \$28,000 a year. The stark reality is that while legal aid organizations work hard to help as many people as they can, due to high demand for legal services and limited available financial resources, only about 20 percent to 25 percent of the civil legal needs of low-income Texans are being met.

Lawyers who volunteer to do pro bono work play an integral part in the delivery of legal services in Texas. And Texas lawyers have shown time and again their willingness to lend a helping hand to ensure access to the judicial system for those who don't know where to turn for legal help or cannot afford it.

According to a State Bar Pro Bono Survey, Texas lawyers contribute an estimated 2.56 million hours of free legal or indirect services to the poor per year. That equates to a dollar value of an estimated \$500 million per year, a tremendous figure that helps illustrate the impact Texas lawyers can have in the delivery of legal services to those in need. Your efforts on behalf of those who cannot afford legal services are much appreciated.

If you have not yet had the opportunity to do pro bono work, I hope you will consider getting involved, even in a small way. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities for lawyers all over the state from every practice area and

whether solo, big firm, or somewhere in between. Legal aid organizations have a constant need for attorneys who can take a pro bono referral or participate in a legal advice clinic. If you are not sure what step to take to get started, the State Bar Legal Services Support Division stands ready to assist with any questions you may have about doing pro bono work. The Division also offers a free e-

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newsletter, *LegalFront*, on current pro bono news and events. To sign up, visit [texasbar.com/probono](http://texasbar.com/probono) and click on "LegalFront Newsletter."

The Division also provides training events for attorneys, such as the Poverty Law Conference, which offers continuing legal education on legal issues affecting low-income Texans. The conference, held in Austin in April, is not just for legal aid attorneys, but also for private attorneys who do pro bono work in civil cases, law students who are interested in providing legal services to the poor, and

pro bono program managers and staff.

Attorneys who report 75 hours or more of pro bono service a year (the State Bar of Texas has an aspirational goal of 50 hours of pro bono legal services) are eligible to join the State Bar Pro Bono College. Created in 1992, the Pro Bono College recognizes attorneys who go above and beyond the State Bar's aspirational goal to help provide legal assistance to poor and underserved Texans. More than 650 attorneys are currently members of the College.

Retired or inactive attorneys who still want to share their legal skills through pro bono representation can join the State Bar's Emeritus Attorney Program. Emeritus attorneys can remain on inactive status, saving on membership dues and MCLE costs. To learn more about these programs and the resources available to volunteer attorneys, contact the Legal Service Support Division's office at (800) 204-2222, ext. 1855 or visit [texasbar.com/probono](http://texasbar.com/probono).

Other pro bono opportunities can be found through the Texas Young Lawyers Association's *Partnering for Pro Bono* program, which brings in-house counsel and law firm lawyers together to take pro bono referrals. To learn more, visit [tyla.org](http://tyla.org).

Those wanting to assist our military veterans and their families can volunteer at a *Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans* legal advice clinic in their area or take a pro bono referral case. To find a clinic near you, visit [texasbar.com/veterans](http://texasbar.com/veterans).

Thank you for all that you do for your clients, our profession, and our judicial system.