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The Honorable Shirley S. Abrahamson
Wisconsin Supreme Court
P.O. Box 1688
Madison, WI 53701-1688

CHIEF JUSTICE SHIRLEY S. ABRAHAMSON
SUPREME COURT

Dear Chief Justice Abrahamson:

Thank you for your letter of December 8, 2011 asking about the University of Wisconsin Law School's pro bono programs and services.

In compliance with the American Bar Association's accreditation standards, the University of Wisconsin Law School offers substantial opportunities for law students to deliver pro bono services. Since 2007, the Law School has been developing and expanding a formal Pro Bono Program in which law students can participate in voluntary pro bono activities. The mission of the Pro Bono Program is "to provide its students and faculty with opportunities to deliver pro bono legal services to underserved members of our community." Students who participate in the Pro Bono Program are provided with hands-on opportunities to develop their legal skills under the supervision of practicing lawyers while becoming familiar with service that would satisfy ABA Model Rule 6.1, which states that lawyers should aspire to provide 50 hours per year of pro bono legal services to people of limited means or nonprofit organizations that serve the poor. In addition to addressing the legal needs of those they are serving, these pro bono activities will undoubtedly encourage a number of students to participate in pro bono service throughout their careers.

Because the Pro Bono Program relies on voluntary student participation to meet the community's legal needs, the UW Law School has established a graduation honor for students who choose to participate in pro bono service throughout their tenure in law school. Providing official recognition at graduation for outstanding student efforts is a central feature of successful law school pro bono programs across the country. In recognition of this fact, the Law School faculty approved the creation of the UW Law School Pro Bono Society in September 2011. With Pro Bono Program approval and oversight, students who complete a minimum of fifty hours of pro bono service will be inducted into the Pro Bono Society and graduate with pro bono distinction. As the Pro Bono Society grows in membership, the UW Law School will be able to maintain an expanding network of students and alumni committed to pro bono efforts.

UW law students participate in pro bono activities coordinated by both the Pro Bono Program and UW law student organizations. To facilitate opportunities for law students to deliver pro bono services, the Pro Bono Program has partnered with a number of non-profit legal service organizations such as the

Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, and Disability Rights Wisconsin. In addition, the program places law student volunteers in local law firms where they assist private attorneys with pro bono cases. Student organizations coordinate similar pro bono opportunities for law student volunteers at organizations such as the Community Immigration Law Center and the Unemployment Appeals Clinic. A number of students also seek out individual pro bono opportunities and are supported in their endeavors by the Pro Bono Program staff. In all of these activities, law students perform work that is primarily legal in nature and serve indigent clients who would not otherwise have access to legal representation.

Along with the pro bono activities available through the Pro Bono Program, many Wisconsin law students develop a commitment to pro bono service through the Law School's clinical programs, internships, and externships. The Frank J. Remington Center at the UW Law School is made up of several criminal and civil clinical programs dedicated to teaching, service, and research. A majority of the clients receiving services from the Law School's clinical programs would not otherwise be able to afford representation.

In addition to providing competent representation for indigent clients, many of the Law School's clinical programs engage in research, advocacy, and program development that seek to benefit Wisconsin residents with limited access to justice. These clinical programs and the Law School's law-in-action approach help develop well-educated, thoughtful graduates who are able successfully to bridge the gap between law school and practice, understanding the importance of engaged citizenship and a commitment to serving those in need.

Several faculty members are also committed to pro bono activities, both in their professional capacity as faculty members and on their own time. The Pro Bono Program is supported by two permanent faculty advisors, and a number of other faculty members have offered their support to various pro bono initiatives.

The Law School, the Bar, and the Court can expand the pro bono services of law students and faculty by encouraging the growth of pro bono services within three constituent groups—the UW Law School Pro Bono Program, local law firms, and local legal service organizations.

The UW Law School Pro Bono Program is currently focused on placing student volunteers in existing legal organizations and firms in order to deliver pro bono services to low-income residents. This strategy increases the capacity of existing organizations delivering civil legal services, but it does not expand the actual number of resources available for indigent clients. In order to expand the impact of the Pro Bono Program's services, therefore, the Program could begin to focus its efforts on establishing new resources for indigent residents in Wisconsin. An example of this type of programming is currently in development. The Pro Bono Program is partnering with the State Bar and local veterans' advocates to establish a legal assistance clinic for veterans. This project is still in the development phase, but it will do much to support the legal needs of indigent Wisconsin veterans. The Pro Bono Program could

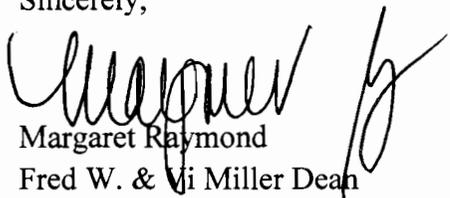
consider developing more such programs in the future, but it would need a significant increase in resources, faculty involvement, and volunteer attorney participation.

Local law firms and private attorneys make up a second group that could increase the available pro bono services of law students at the UW Law School. In order to ensure that our students are performing legal services in an ethical manner and in accordance with Wisconsin law, all student pro bono volunteer projects require attorney involvement. This requirement makes it essential that local attorneys take an interest in supporting the pro bono efforts of UW law students. The Pro Bono Program continually recruits area attorneys through events at the Law School, publicity within the legal community, and recruitment events at local firms such as the Dane County Pro Bono Road Show. Despite these efforts, private attorney recruitment continues to be a challenge. The Court and the Bar could enhance the relationship between the Pro Bono Program and private attorneys by providing encouragement and incentives for firms to involve law student volunteers in their existing pro bono activities.

The final group includes local legal service organizations and non-profit advocacy groups that serve indigent clients in a variety of civil legal matters. The Pro Bono Program has already established partnerships with a number of such groups, but several organizations have found it challenging to expend staff resources on the task of supervising student volunteers. Although coordinating pro bono opportunities for students does not take a substantial amount of time, few organizations have an individual staff member assigned to this role. As such, those who do coordinate student pro bono opportunities are often those individuals who choose to devote extra time above and beyond their own work responsibilities. The Pro Bono Program is open to supporting legal service organizations with this type of coordination, but it is essential that each organization commit to providing reliable staff support when it is needed. This minimal effort will result in substantially improved client outcomes when organizations can come to rely on the pro bono activities of student volunteers for the ongoing operation of their programs.

We are grateful to the Court for its efforts in the past to encourage attorney and law student involvement in pro bono activities, and would be very pleased to meet and discuss further ways that the Law School, the Bar and the Court could expand the pro bono services of law students and faculty.

Sincerely,



Margaret Raymond
Fred W. & Vi Miller Dean
And Professor of Law

cc: Ben Kempinen
Marsha Mansfield
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