

PLEDGE PROGRAM

Background

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (“ADA”) and related state and federal laws have provided a means to end discrimination against persons with all types of disabilities such as vision impairment, hearing impairment, mobility impairment, or medical conditions which limit a person’s ability to work for extended time periods. Nonetheless, legislation alone cannot overcome the prejudices and stigmatization that have historically evolved from a societal mindset nurtured on the fiction that disabilities equate with diminished competence.

Overcoming the attitudinal barriers and institutional impediments imbedded in a culture of indifference, represents a formidable challenge. It will require nothing less than a “retrofitting” of our interpersonal values and organizational structure, which exists at the root of the problem.

The State Bar of California has clearly acknowledged its responsibility to address this issue, particularly as it has impacted on legal professionals. A significant action taken by the Board of Governors in meeting the problem head-on, was to establish a special committee for this purpose. The Committee on Legal Professionals with Disabilities was formed with the charge to recommend policies and programs, which would promote full and equal participation in the legal profession and legal system for legal professionals with disabilities and chronic medical conditions. Although the State Bar's leadership role is essential here, the ultimate success of this enterprise will depend on a unified effort exerted by the entire legal community to accomplish the mission.

Implementation

Toward this end and as part of the Committee’s overall outreach strategy, the legal community is invited to participate in a Pledge Program. This is viewed as an initial step for enlisting the assistance and support of various sectors of the legal profession -- large law firms¹, bar associations, law schools and the courts. The Pledge Program is intended to be phased in over time and is considered a long-term continuing program.

Signatories will be requested to endorse the program both in word and in deed, within the context of their own operations. An initial informational packet, including a pledge to be signed by the top executive, will be sent to legal employers. Employers will submit signed pledges and requests for recognition to the State Bar.

Recognition

The State Bar will issue a Proclamation to designated Pledge Program Signatories in recognition of their commitment to the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities and chronic medical conditions in the legal profession.

To increase the visibility and status of the participants and to increase visibility, awareness and acceptance of the employment of this population, public recognition will be sought for the Signatories. Also, they will be acknowledged to all other Signatories. On a continuing basis, Signatories also will be publicized to all interested state and national media both within and outside the legal community.

¹ Following initial introduction of the Pledge Program to large law firms in the private sector, the Committee plans to reach out and involve sole proprietorships, partnerships, firms of all sizes, public agencies, and other organizations and entities which employ attorneys and judges.