

AGENDA ITEM

MAY 54-166

National Pro Bono Week
Celebration Resolution

DATE: April 14, 2009

TO: Members, Board of Governors
Members, Board Committee on Stakeholder Relations

FROM: Sharon Ngim, Staff Liaison, Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services, Office of Legal Services, Access & Fairness Programs

SUBJECT: National Pro Bono Week Celebration Resolution

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The American Bar Association designated the week of October 25-31, 2009 as the first National Pro Bono Week Celebration. The celebration offers an opportunity to recognize the valuable pro bono contributions made by lawyers throughout the year, and to increase pro bono participation that will help narrow the justice gap. The Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services and its staff recommends that the Board of Governors adopt a resolution that recognizes the National Pro Bono Week Celebration, commends California attorneys for ongoing pro bono contributions and reminds attorneys about the importance of engaging in and supporting pro bono participation .

BACKGROUND

At their August 2008 Annual Meeting, the American Bar Association designated the week of October 25-31, 2009 as the inaugural National Pro Bono Week Celebration. The celebration offers an opportunity to recognize the valuable pro bono contributions made by lawyers throughout the year, and to increase pro bono participation that will help narrow the justice gap. Though lawyers across the country donate more than 20 million hours of free legal services each year, 80% of the civil legal needs of America's poor remain unmet.

Hundreds of events are being planned at the national, state and local levels to highlight pro bono during the last week of October. The national effort is not intended to supplant or interfere with events that already have been scheduled, but it is hoped that groups will commit to hold at least one event during the week of October 25 - 31. The ABA

developed a website devoted to the Celebration at www.celebrateprobono.org. The site provides information, resources and support to groups interested in hosting events in their communities.

In California, a steering committee was formed in February to coordinate events that will take place in the San Francisco Bay Area during the National Pro Bono Week Celebration. Steering committee participants to date include representatives from the ABA, State Bar of California, local bars, legal services providers, law schools and large law firms. As others across the state prepare for the celebration, the committee will share their final plans for possible replication. State Bar staff and members of the Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services (SCDLS) will help track pro bono events and activities sponsored by local bar associations and legal services providers, and coordinate within and outside the State Bar to centralize the information.

FISCAL/STAFF IMPACT

None

BOARD BOOK/ADMINISTRATIVE MANUAL IMPACT

None

RECOMMENDATION

The Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services and its staff recommend that the Board of Governors adopt a resolution recognizing the first National Pro Bono Week Celebration.

RESOLUTION

PROPOSED BOARD COMMITTEE RESOLUTION

If the Board Committee on Stakeholder Relations agrees with the above recommendation, the following resolution is suggested:

RESOLVED, that the Board Committee on Stakeholder Relations recommends that the Board of Governors adopt the following Resolution:

WHEREAS more than 6 million Californians live below 125% of the federal poverty level and there are fewer than 800 legal aid attorneys to serve them; and

WHEREAS the State Bar's Pro Bono Resolution adopted in December 1989 and amended in June 2002 strongly encourages all State Bar members to contribute at least 50 hours of pro bono legal services a

year and to make a financial contribution to non-profit legal services organizations, and

WHEREAS California attorneys donate thousands of hours of pro bono legal services and make annual financial contributions to the Justice Gap Fund and directly to legal services organizations, to help address the huge unmet need for legal assistance to California's poor, especially in light of the current economic situation; and

WHEREAS the State Bar of California actively promotes pro bono participation in a variety of ways on an ongoing basis and gives special recognition annually for outstanding pro bono contributions made by its members; and

WHEREAS the American Bar Association has designated October 25 – 31, 2009 as the first National Pro Bono Week Celebration to recognize the valuable pro bono contributions made by lawyers throughout the year, and to increase pro bono participation across the country to narrow the justice gap;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Governors of the State Bar of California recognizes the week of October 25 - 31, 2009, as the first National Pro Bono Week Celebration, commends California attorneys for their ongoing pro bono contributions, and reminds all members that by engaging in pro bono work and providing financial support they can make a significant difference in the lives of California's poor who would not otherwise have access to the legal system.

PROPOSED BOARD RESOLUTION

If the Board of Governors concurs with the recommendation of the Board Committee on Stakeholder Relations, the following resolution is suggested:

WHEREAS more than 6 million Californians live below 125% of the federal poverty level and there are fewer than 800 legal aid attorneys to serve them; and

WHEREAS the State Bar's Pro Bono Resolution adopted in December 1989 and amended in June 2002 strongly encourages all State Bar members to contribute at least 50 hours of pro bono legal services a year and to make a financial contribution to non-profit legal services organizations, and

WHEREAS California attorneys donate thousands of hours of pro bono legal services and make annual financial contributions to the Justice Gap Fund and directly to legal services organizations, to help address the huge unmet need for legal assistance to California's poor, especially in light of the current economic situation; and

WHEREAS the State Bar of California actively promotes pro bono participation in a variety of ways on an ongoing basis and gives special recognition annually for outstanding pro bono contributions made by its members; and

WHEREAS the American Bar Association has designated October 25 – 31, 2009 as the first National Pro Bono Week Celebration to recognize the valuable pro bono contributions made by lawyers throughout the year, and to increase pro bono participation across the country to narrow the justice gap;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Governors of the State Bar of California recognizes the week of October 25 - 31, 2009, as the first National Pro Bono Week Celebration, commends California attorneys for their ongoing pro bono contributions, and reminds all members that by engaging in pro bono work and providing financial support they can make a significant difference in the lives of California's poor who would not otherwise have access to the legal system.