



PRESS RELEASE

New York State
Unified Court System

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Chief Judge Announces New Attorney Registration Pro Bono Reporting Requirement

NEW YORK – Chief Judge Lippman and the Presiding Justices of the Appellate Division today announced that, effective May 1, 2013, every attorney admitted to practice law in New York will be required to report the following information when filing their biennial attorney registration statement:

- (1) the number of hours voluntarily spent providing unpaid legal services to poor and underserved clients during the previous biennial registration period; and
- (2) the amount of voluntary financial contributions made to organizations primarily or substantially engaged in providing legal services to the poor and underserved during the previous biennial registration period.

The new reporting requirement takes effect together with the amendment of Rule 6.1 of the Rules of Professional Conduct (22 NYCRR Part 1200), increasing from 20 hours to 50 hours the amount of pro bono service that lawyers are strongly encouraged to provide each year, and quantifying the minimal financial contributions that lawyers should aspire to make to organizations providing legal services to the poor and underserved. Pro bono service and financial contributions remain completely voluntary in New York.

The amendments of Part 118 and Rule 6.1, first announced by Chief Judge Lippman during his State of the Judiciary message in February, are based on the recommendations of the Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services in New York. The new rules are intended to promote increased pro bono work by admitted attorneys in response to the documented gap in meeting the legal needs of low-income New Yorkers. According to the Task Force, New York joins seven other states that have instituted pro bono reporting requirements to promote and encourage pro bono participation. These states reported increased pro bono service by members of the private bar following adoption of mandatory reporting. The reporting requirement will also enable the court system and the legal profession to identify and honor those attorneys whose dedication to pro bono causes goes above and beyond the aspirational goals.

The timing of the increase in the pro bono benchmark from 20 hours to 50 hours comes after a recent ABA survey of pro bono participation in New York revealing that the average attorney already performs 66 hours of pro bono each year. The 50-hour level also is consistent with the pro bono requirement for admission to the New York State Bar – the first of its kind in the nation – announced by Judge Lippman on Law Day 2012.

Judge Lippman said, “While the legal profession in our state selflessly provides millions of hours of pro bono work to help people of limited means each year, the civil legal needs of low income New Yorkers are enormous and continue to grow as a result of the uncertain economy and the recent devastation of Superstorm Sandy. I have every confidence that the steps we take today will help increase pro bono service and narrow the enormous access to justice gap in our state. I am pleased and grateful to have the full support of Presiding Justices Gonzalez, Eng, Peters and Scudder, all of whom are dedicated to fostering an unmatched culture of service in all members of the legal profession in our state.”

Pro bono services covered by section 118.1(e)(14) are those personally provided without expectation of receiving a fee; services billed to a client but left unpaid are not included and should not be reported. Attorneys “retired” from the practice of law as defined in section 118.1(g), or employed by an organization primarily or substantially engaged in the provision of pro bono legal services, may choose not to report pro bono service or financial contributions.

Detailed information concerning the new reporting requirement is available at www.nycourts.gov/attorneys/probono.

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