

Introduction to Pro Bono Scholars Seminar

I'm Janet DiFiore, Chief Judge of the New York Court of Appeals and the State of New York, and I'm pleased to welcome you to the Pro Bono Scholars Program.

Let me start by congratulating you on completing the bar exam, and for choosing to devote your final semester of law school to the Pro Bono Scholars Program, an excellent decision that has positioned you to use your newly acquired legal skills and knowledge to make a meaningful difference in the lives of low-income New Yorkers, many of whom are struggling with pandemic-related legal problems involving housing, foreclosure, domestic and family violence, unemployment benefits, consumer credit and other life-altering issues.

This very special program -- the first of its kind in the nation -- does a fantastic job of introducing law students to the practice of law under the supervision of attorney mentors while at the same time conveying, in a very real and personal way, the important and noble

values that lie at the heart of our legal profession – especially our moral and ethical obligation to serve others. We are very proud of the Pro Bono Scholars Program, and most pleased that the ABA House of Delegates has passed a resolution encouraging all jurisdictions to adopt our model.

And so, given the demonstrated value and impact of the Program, we are grateful to the Deans and Pro Bono Scholar Administrators at all 15 of our New York law schools, and at the participating law schools outside New York, as well as the many legal service providers and nonprofits that supervise our pro bono scholars, for their diligent efforts to maintain the continuity of the Program during the pandemic. I commend all of them for engineering a swift and efficient conversion to the “remote service” delivery model that has allowed for the continued provision of critically needed legal assistance during the public health crisis.

And we are especially proud and grateful to all of you, our Scholars, because notwithstanding all of the disruption that you have faced in your personal and professional lives and during the final half of your law school experience, you have persevered and shown your

commitment to the Pro Bono Scholars Program, joining dozens of your fellow law students in answering the call to service at this time of great need.

In a few short months, you will be admitted to the bar, you will begin practicing law and you will be on your way to a career in service to others -- your clients. I have every confidence that the hands-on legal experience you will gain this semester will serve you well, and that it will provide you with the opportunity to build your professional reputation and form valuable and necessary relationships with practicing lawyers and mentors, relationships that will guide and help your careers well into the future.

But beyond the many practical benefits you will gain from your work in the Program, I do hope that your service as a Pro Bono Scholar will give you a sense of the great power that you will have as a lawyer, the power to make a positive difference in the lives of the individuals and communities you serve. And I hope that you will come to realize that with your new-found power and privilege comes the corresponding responsibility to ensure that our justice system is open and accessible to all individuals, regardless of who they are or where

they come from in life.

So, whatever you choose to do with your law degree, whatever kind of practice you choose to pursue, never forget the enormity of the privilege that you have been given, and always maintain pro bono service among the priorities you set in both your personal and professional lives.

I wish you the very best of luck this Spring as a Pro Bono Scholar, and in your future careers as lawyers.

Thank you for your service.