



Fulfilling Our Role as Guardians of the Justice System: A Statement of Principles for Lawyers in the Chicago Area

Introduction

As lawyers, we are trustees of the justice system and have a unique professional responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to that system, not just people who can afford it. Although there are many other worthy causes, if we as lawyers do not lead the way on access to justice, who will?

By committing to adhere to the following Statement of Principles, lawyers in the Chicago area help make our nation's promise of equal access to justice a reality in our community by investing our time and money and using our influence to advance this cause. As reflected in these Principles, each one of these three distinct and complementary contributions is necessary to ensure equal access to justice:

- **Time**—As lawyers, we have been given the special privilege of being the trustees of the justice system, and with that comes a special responsibility to use our training and skills to ensure those who can't afford our services have access to that system. The Principles reflect that in addition to providing direct pro bono legal assistance, there are other important ways we can use our time to advance access to justice as well.
- **Money**—As lawyers, providing our personal financial support for legal aid and related access to justice initiatives is another integral part of fulfilling our professional responsibility. The Illinois Supreme Court Rule requiring lawyers to report both our monetary contributions to support legal aid and our pro bono hours in the annual ARDC registration process underscores that point. Providing our financial support for legal aid is an essential corollary to our pro bono work, as legal aid programs provide the necessary infrastructure to support pro bono efforts (i.e., screening, training and support). Legal aid programs also provide critical legal assistance to low-income and disadvantaged people in need for matters where pro bono is not a practical solution.
- **Influence**—As lawyers, we all have influence that we can use to help fulfill our professional responsibility as guardians of the justice system, and this influence takes many different forms. For example, we need to use our individual and collective influence to lead the charge in making the case that government bears the primary responsibility for ensuring equal access to justice, one of our nation's fundamental principles. All of us can help in those efforts, and as emphasized in the Principles, lawyers can use our influence as lawyers to be ambassadors for access to justice in other important ways as well.

Lawyers can find resources to help them implement each of these Principles on the CBF website, www.chicagobarfoundation.org, or can contact the CBF with questions by calling (312) 554-1204.

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Statement of Principles for Lawyers in the Chicago Area

The following Statement of Principles reflects the broad tenets of the Illinois Supreme Court Rules and The Chicago Bar Association's standing pro bono resolution. As lawyers, each of us should make the following contributions to fulfill our role as guardians of the justice system:

- 1. Do Pro Bono Work and Contribute Time in Other Ways to Advance Access to Justice**
 - Strive to provide at least 50 hours of pro bono services each year
 - Lawyers can do pro bono work in a variety of ways by providing direct legal assistance to low-income and disadvantaged clients, or by providing representation or training to the organizations that serve them
 - Promote access to justice by serving on relevant boards and similar bodies
 - Examples include serving on boards or committees for legal aid organizations, or serving on bar committees and similar initiatives that are focused on supporting legal aid and access to justice
 - Volunteer in other law-related efforts that build awareness of access to justice issues
 - Examples include teaching young people about the law through the Lawyers in the Classroom or Street Law programs, or mentoring law students who are interested in legal aid and public service careers

- 2. Provide Financial Support for Pro Bono, Legal Aid and Access to Justice in Three Complementary Ways**
 - Support one or more of our community's many outstanding pro bono and legal aid organizations directly
 - Support the annual CBF Investing in Justice Campaign, where 100% of the Campaign proceeds go directly toward CBF grants to a broad range of pro bono and legal aid organizations that serve low-income and disadvantaged people in the Chicago area
 - Support the CBF's system-wide efforts to advance access to justice, which include mobilizing our legal community around this issue, working to strengthen our community's pro bono and legal aid organizations, advocating for sufficient government funding for legal aid and promoting broader community support, helping dedicated attorneys pursue careers in legal aid, and working with the courts to make the justice system more user-friendly and accessible for those in need

- 3. Use Influence to Support Pro Bono, Legal Aid and Access to Justice**
 - Advocate at the federal, state and local levels of government for adequate funding for legal aid and to promote related access to justice policies
 - Serve as an ambassador for access to justice in firms, organizations and the community
 - Examples include serving as a Vice Chair for a law firm or organization in the annual CBF Investing in Justice Campaign, promoting access to justice among colleagues, or encouraging a firm's business partners to provide support for access to justice
 - Advocate for *cypres* awards to support pro bono, legal aid and access to justice when there are opportunities to do so