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PRO BONO PROFILE

Pro Bono Profile: Firm Sustains Long-Term Pro Bono Work

By Adrienne Hagepanos

Pro bono work in Maryland comes in all shapes and sizes and is done to assist with the spectrum of our neighbors' legal woes. Members of our community who are routinely excluded from the justice system by virtue of their inability to pay the full going rate for legal assistance can turn toward our state's pro bono referral program system and be connected with attorneys in a huge range of practice areas. While much pro bono work is done by solo practitioners, those who work for the government and larger firms also find their way to engage in meaningful volunteer opportunities.

For the last 21 years, the firm of Gordon, Feinblatt, Rothman, Hoffberger & Hollander, LLC, has been a leader among these larger firms. Gordon Feinblatt has been working with the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers' Service (MVLS) since 1981 to provide pro bono assistance to almost any qualified recipient in need. The 353 pro bono cases that the firm has accepted through MVLS have included custody cases, collections, deed changes, representation of non-profits as clients and preparation of tax returns, representing 3686 hours of pro bono time. Additionally, the firm provides mentors to MVLS attorneys handling pro bono bankruptcy cases and supplies a volunteer attorney from among their ranks to guide a group of *pro se* debtors toward proper filing of Chapter 7 bankruptcy papers.

While many cases have been placed with Gordon Feinblatt attorneys through MVLS, the firm has also worked with other organizations to serve the community. The Public Justice Center, The Community Law Center, The Legal Aid Bureau, The Women's Law Center, and Advocates for Children and Youth have all been recipients of the quality assistance that the firm offers.

Gordon Feinblatt encourages the perpetuation of pro bono work not only through the mentorship of outside bankruptcy attorneys handling MVLS cases, but by creating an environment that supports pro bono efforts firm-wide and incubates their summer law clerks' interests in future pro bono work. The representation of pro bono clients at Gordon Feinblatt is performed by the seasoned attorneys on staff, but summer law clerks are similarly given opportunities to see how pro bono work can be sustainable within a local firm. Under supervision, summer clerks are encouraged to participate in client meetings and assist with pro bono work as they would assist with other tasks. The example the firm sets, both in dedication and sustainable business practices, is reportedly admired and emulated by the students that find their way to Gordon Feinblatt every summer.

According to MVLS, Gordon Feinblatt has donated approximately 3,500 hours of hard work towards our community, the monetary value of which amounting to at least \$600,000. That the donation was made in time and quality legal services are far more valuable than the numbers illustrate. Support pro bono work in your community. Add your resources to the fight. For more information on the legal service volunteer opportunities in Maryland, contact Sharon E. Goldsmith at the Pro Bono Resource Center at (410) 837-9379 or (800) 396-1274, or e-mail sgoldsmith@probonomd.org.

Adrienne Hagepanos is Project Assistant for the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland.

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