



Hope Olsson

I am tremendously honored to receive the ABA's Pro Bono Publico Award and especially want to express my deep gratitude to the public service attorneys who work throughout their careers to provide civil legal services to underrepresented people within our communities. It is these public service attorneys who set the example for all of us to take pride in the profession we practice and the services we provide to clients.

As a second-career attorney, I am always aware of what a privilege it is to practice in a profession that is interesting, challenging and rewarding on a daily basis. The opportunity to do pro bono work by serving individual clients as well as the greater community is an inherent attribute in the practice of law. It is always an honor as well as a privilege to be able to provide legal services to pro bono clients.

One of the primary reasons students go to law school is to learn a profession in which they can help others and give something back to their communities. I was fortunate to attend law school at the State University of New York at Buffalo which has a strong emphasis on public service law and students are encouraged to make a commitment to pro bono work.

It is my good luck to practice in a community that has an established and strong structure within which attorneys can do pro bono work easily and efficiently. The Volunteer Legal Services Project (VLSP) of Rochester, New York, provides a framework and support services for attorneys to work with pro bono clients. Most importantly, VLSP provides the catalyst to enable more attorneys to make a commitment to do pro bono work.

In particular I want to honor the work of Farmworker Legal Services of New York which is committed to upholding the legal rights of those who work so hard, under unenviable conditions, to bring food to our tables. This population is often invisible to the general public, and it is constantly an uphill battle to pursue their legal rights. The public service attorneys who work in this area serve as model advocates in working to pursue the basic constitutional rights of individuals.

For many pro bono clients, their presenting legal problem is one of the very few times they will be involved in the legal system. The work of legal services and pro bono lawyers serves to demonstrate that the law can help solve these problems. It is an opportunity to engender respect for the work attorneys do and for the legal system as a whole. I am honored to have the opportunity to do pro bono work on a regular basis and I encourage other attorneys to think about why they went to law school in the first place and to do pro bono work. Pro bono work is an excellent way to serve people who wouldn't otherwise have legal representation and to make the community a better place for all.