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Office's Pro Bono Initiative Recognized

Two-year-Old Program To Receive Third Award

COLUMBUS – For offering free legal services to Ohio’s low-income senior citizens, the Ohio Attorney General’s Office has been selected as a 2002 American Bar Association (ABA) Pro Bono Publico Award winner.

“The Ohio Attorney General’s Office shows that government attorneys who are already engaged in public service can also do pro bono work and do it well,” said Robert Weiner, chairman of the ABA committee that selected the winners. “The dedication, creativity, and commitment of these lawyers to helping the poor gain access to justice set an example all lawyers should try to follow.”

In May 2000, Attorney General Betty D. Montgomery unveiled an office-wide Pro Bono Initiative to provide legal assistance for seniors and hospice patients across Ohio. Staff attorneys participating in the program offer their time and talents to provide legal assistance to those who can’t afford it. Assistant attorneys general are trained to provide wills, general powers of attorney, durable powers of attorney for health care, and other “end-of-life” legal issues. Once training is completed, attorneys are allowed to provide their services at no charge for up to 40 hours a year.

“This most recent award reflects the unwavering dedication of my staff in ensuring this program’s success,” Attorney General Montgomery said. “But I’m more proud of their service to those less fortunate.”

As a state senator, Montgomery wrote and sponsored legislation that made advance directives, such as living wills, possible in Ohio.

Ohio’s pro bono program has been honored two previous times. In 2001, the Columbus Bar Foundation and Association recognized the program with its award for Outstanding Pro Bono Service by a Governmental Agency. The Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation and the Ohio Bar Association presented the Attorney General’s Office with the 2001 Presidential Award for Pro Bono Service last year as well.

The Attorney General’s Office has made this program and its services available to Ohioans outside of the major urban areas. The office has set up small, temporary offices at senior centers where clients are interviewed and documents are drafted, printed, and executed on-site all in the same day.

Since the program’s inception, 125 assistant attorneys general, 20 paralegals, and 15 secretaries have answered the call to help underserved Ohioans handle their legal matters. To date, the office has served 625 clients by providing them with 1,235 healthcare powers of attorney, living wills, powers of attorney, and wills.

The Attorney General will accept the award on behalf of the office at the ABA's annual meeting in August in Washington, D.C.