

For overachievers only: Go for 20+ and do the + for Florida!

by Judge Catherine Peek McEwen



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Members of The Florida Bar have an aspirational goal of at least 20 hours of pro bono legal service to the poor¹ or a total contribution of \$350 (the value of a single billable hour) to one or more legal aid organizations.² The Florida Bar mandates that we report our hours or total monetary donation annually on the bar membership renewal form.³ If you meet these minimums, then you have met the terms of your Oath of Admission to “never reject the cause of the defenseless or oppressed.” You are a man or woman of your word. And that’s good. No one wants to be called out for reneging on a solemn vow.

But why stop at the minimum? Lawyers are generally overachievers. After all, you spent additional time in graduate or postgraduate school, took and passed the grueling Florida Bar exam, and are involved in a noble professional fellowship that many only dream of joining. You probably strived for straight As in all your school years. Simply put, that drive to succeed is in our blood.

If you want to go above the aspirational 20 hours, there is no reason to stop at 20. For that matter, you can provide free legal service *and* pay the suggested monetary donation or even more (why not the value of just two billable hours?).

While it is true that out-of-staters may fulfill their professional responsibility to provide pro bono legal service to the poor in the state in which they

work or reside,⁴ please consider performing the above-and-beyond hours on Florida cases. How do you find pro bono opportunities in Florida, given that you live outside Florida? Florida Pro Bono Matters is the answer. This easy-to-use platform allows you to filter by location or subject matter. If you have family in a particular town, pick a case from there. If you went to law school in Florida, pick a case from that town. Had a memorable vacay in a Florida town? Pay it back by taking a case from there. Want to help a civil rights cause? Put “civil rights” in the search field. Want to help an elderly client? Put “elder” or “grandmother” in the search field. Go here to see the platform and available cases: <https://www.floridaprobono.org/pb-matters/>.

If you attended law school in Florida, another satisfying way of providing pro bono legal service to the poor here is to pair up with a student at your institution and take on a case together during The Florida Bar Foundation’s Law School Challenge,

which usually occurs in the first few months of the year. Make it a New Year’s resolution.

And don’t be afraid of stepping outside your comfort zone. Most legal aid organizations have training modules and will pair you with a mentor. Bonuses: That mentor could become a referral source for paying business. And you just might develop a new line of business or expertise.

In this pandemic era, in which most legal services are being provided virtually anyway, being out of state is no excuse for you to squelch your inner overachiever. Let him or her out! Visit Florida Pro Bono Matters today.

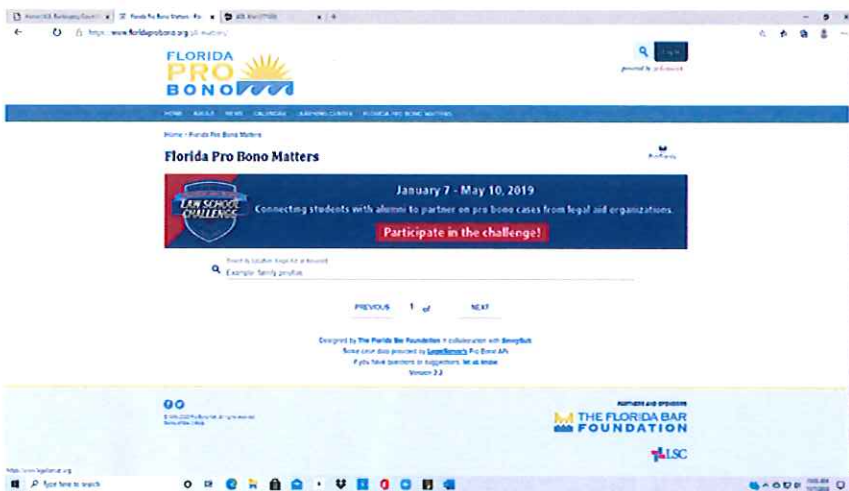
Endnotes

1 For a primer on what is and is not creditable pro bono legal service to the poor, by Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody (created when she was a Florida circuit judge), please go here: <https://www.flabizlaw.org/assets/pdf/probonoprimer.pdf>.

2 R. Regulating Fla. Bar 4-6.1(b).

3 *Id.* at 4-6.1(d).

4 *Id.* at 4-6.1(f).



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