

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



SUPREME COURT
Suite 2525, One Oxford Centre
301 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

MAX BAER
CHIEF JUSTICE

Phone: (412) 467-2220

May 16, 2022

Dear Counselor:

As Chief Justice of the now 300-year-old Pennsylvania Supreme Court, the oldest appellate court in America, I am delighted to join with the new Pennsylvania Bar President, Jay Silberblatt of Allegheny County, in celebrating the rich tradition of Pennsylvania lawyers in supporting legal aid and *pro bono* service for the neediest among us.

Promoting legal aid and *pro bono* legal services has been a major emphasis of my time on the Court. I cherish how the Unified Judicial System has provided access to justice for so many Pennsylvanians as the Courts have worked to achieve the promise of equal justice for all. Yet the needs of our poorest citizens continue to challenge both the criminal and civil justice systems. A Constitutional mandate buttresses efforts for access to legal services in criminal matters, but an underfunded and overburdened civil legal aid system threatens delivery of civil services. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court supports civil legal aid in a variety of ways, from funding a loan forgiveness program for legal services practitioners to making it easier for retired attorneys to provide *pro bono* service through Emeritus Status. The Court has also approved awarding continuing legal education (CLE) credits for *pro bono* service with authorized providers.

Pennsylvania is a diverse state, and the range of legal aid and *pro bono* programs highlights that diversity. Recent studies still show that far too many low-income Pennsylvanians receive little or no civil legal aid or *pro bono* support, despite all our efforts, and that society suffers without full access to justice.

Every lawyer in Pennsylvania will once again contribute in 2022 to civil legal aid through the IOLTA portion of our annual licensing fee, but it is the volunteer efforts-- whether in direct representation of clients or further financial support -- that most greatly impact those in need, especially as we move out of the pandemic. The Pennsylvania

Legal Aid Network, in partnership with our regional legal aid providers and a network of specialty legal aid programs, helps provide the framework and structure for legal assistance for the poor. Pro Bono attorneys, encouraged by the Pennsylvania Bar Association and local bars to fulfill their aspirational duty under Rule 6.1 to “render public interest legal service”, provide time and financial contributions to help fuel the important work of representing those clients who have critical needs but cannot afford to retain private counsel. Our law schools inculcate the values of *pro bono* service in the next generation of Pennsylvania lawyers through law school legal aid clinics.

Please examine Pennsylvania Free Legal Answers, PALawHelp.org, and PProbono.net, sites promoted by the PBA and the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, to see what resources are available to those in need and what opportunities exist for *pro bono* service.

I am inspired by the lawyers, judges and others in our Commonwealth who have worked to bridge the justice gap, especially during the crisis of the pandemic. I look forward to what we can all do in 2022 and beyond.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Max Baer".

Max Baer