Representing those who cannot afford a lawyer has given me some of the most deeply rewarding experiences of my thirty-year career. From my first weeks as an attorney, I have almost always had a pro bono case on my desk. At this stage of my career, some of the greatest joy comes from collaborating with younger lawyers on cases, using the experience to help them grow into terrific, public-spirited lawyers.

Chuck Smith
CBF President
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
Many people don’t understand what we mean when we speak of the “access to justice” problem. Quite simply, it means that 80% of our citizens cannot afford to pay for the legal services they need. As a result, this third-branch of government is not serving the people whom it was Constitutionally designed to protect.

By performing pro bono legal work, we are making a small dent in this enormous societal problem. Taking an individual pro bono case does not make the issue go away, but it does immeasurably impact the life of the person we represent. In my experience, performing that service feels better than any fees we’re accustomed to receiving.

Dan Kotin
CBA President
Tomasik Kotin Kasserman
Pro bono has been an important part of my practice since I began practicing in 1992. I have handled mortgage foreclosure and personal injury defense, housing, race and sex discrimination cases, breach of contract and consumer protection cases on a pro bono basis. I saw, very early on, that people are victimized by their inability to pay for legal counsel, especially when they are unaware of their legal rights. It is rewarding to see how my help has made a real difference in their lives. Throughout my career, I have found ways to budget my time to take on pro bono cases. When I see the difference it makes, the extra time I spend is more than worth it.

Jerry Brown
Siegel & Callahan P.C.
Adjunct Professor, The John Marshall Law School
The court needs pro bono attorneys who step up and handle cases for free. Probate judges appoint pro bono counsel to serve as guardians ad litem or to represent respondents. Pro bono attorneys also help low income parties struggling to comply with the requirements of the Probate Act. Without these selfless volunteer attorneys, it would be very difficult to help the children, families, and people with disabilities that come before us every day.

Hon. Mary Ellen Coghlan
Presiding Judge
Probate Division
Circuit Court of Cook County
“Yes, it is time to retire, but first find something that interests you,” my wife replied.

Good advice leading me to pro bono.

I could still practice law plus I had a sense of the goodness of the work—relieving a debt problem, caring for an aged parent, correcting a property interest and so many other issues.

One becomes filled with a sense of well-being, personal pride and respect for the importance of law to our society.
My clients were good hard-working people. Initially, I was skeptical about representing them since I normally help people save their homes. But my clients, because their financial situation had changed, couldn’t afford their home anymore and wanted help just turning it over to the bank. So why didn’t they simply give it back? It’s never that simple. They’d been trying for a year. Without an attorney, the bank ignored them. My involvement got the bank to open the door. Then, we were able to negotiate details, draft documents, and sign off on everything. Afterwards, my client told me that he felt that the weight of the world had been lifted off his shoulders.

Salvador J. Lopez
Robson & Lopez LLC
I wanted a cause that I was emotionally tied to. I found it with a non-profit that educates street children in developing countries using dance as the first platform for teaching. I have had an extraordinary journey in assisting with legal advocacy and shaping the strategy of a small but impactful organization that focuses on three things that I care about immensely—children, education and the arts. The highlight came when I traveled to Rwanda for 9 days to visit the street children that are impacted by the collective work of the organization. It motivated me even further in my pro bono work. I realized how many people in this world need the legal profession’s help. There is no limit to this assistance.

Sucheta Misra
Counsel, Law Division
United Airlines
I helped clients who left abusive and absent spouses to move on with their lives, grandmothers obtain guardianship so they could provide for their grandchildren’s needs, a father win visitation with his children, obtained disability benefits for children, and reversed a wrongful conviction of a mother in prison for murdering her son. I know an attorney’s simplest effort can obtain the most efficient and effective results. I know an attorney’s voice can be louder and more effective and that our justice system works best when it is accessible and fair for everyone. But I also learned about giving second chances, going to any length for your child, and fighting to live a kind, proud, and content life. Representing these clients has been a gift.
Doing pro bono work helps lawyers feel good about being lawyers. And that makes them better law firm lawyers. As Pro Bono Partner at Dentons, I see this in action. Two Dentons associates recently won asylum for their transgender client and saw the joy and relief on their client’s face when the Judge’s ruling was translated in court. This moving experience will stay with our lawyers throughout their careers. Dentons lawyers also have had life-changing (and affirming) experiences representing clients in domestic violence and clemency projects. In each case, partners and associates helped a low-income person in need. And by giving their time and talents, our lawyers became better and happier lawyers.

Ben Weinberg
Pro Bono Partner
Dentons
My pro bono work means so much to me because of the opportunity it affords to provide real, tangible benefit to those who need it most. More importantly, however, I think it helps to give voice, agency, and even pride to some people who are aching to be heard, to be active, and to be able to hold their heads high in the face of at-times debilitating adversity. It is an honor to be able to do that kind of work.

Christopher Wilson
Associate
Winston & Strawn LLP