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### *Work for Free?*

Maryland Rule of Professional Conduct 6.1 states, *inter alia*, that "[a] lawyer has a professional responsibility to render pro bono publico legal service." The Rule sets forth the methods by which a full-time attorney can discharge her annual aspirational goal of fifty hours of pro bono service. It states that unless a lawyer is legally prohibited from doing so, free legal service should be provided to people of limited means and to charitable, religious, civic and other such organizations in matters designed to meet the needs of the indigent or when the organization's resources would be significantly depleted if it had to pay standard legal fees. The rule recognizes that time may be devoted to activities to improve "the law, the legal system or the legal profession" and that a lawyer may discharge her pro bono responsibilities through the financial support of organizations that provide legal services to the indigent. The rule is aspirational only and specifically states that non-compliance is not a ground for sanctions.

I'm sure you have heard the gripe that no other profession is responsible to render free services to its clients, patients or customers. While I don't know if our aspirational responsibility is mirrored elsewhere in society, does it really matter? Our society is based not upon ethnicity, heritage, religion or race, but upon the Rule of Law. We are the primary promoters of that Rule and does not our stewardship require us to embrace the logic of pro bono service? Perhaps it is an overstatement to claim that justice denied to one is justice denied to all. But if we are to serve (and our profession is nothing if not one of public service) must we not seek to ensure access to the benefits of the law to all who share our society?

The recognition of our responsibility to those in need is nothing really new. The District of Columbia's Comment to its version of the Rule states: "[It] incorporates the legal profession's historical commitment to the principle that all persons in our society should be able to obtain necessary legal services...a lawyer's pro bono services are sometimes necessary to assert or defend public rights belonging to the public generally where no individual or group can afford to pay..."

Even if our responsibility to the dispossessed was not manifested in a Rule of Professional Conduct, pro bono service should be considered a privilege of our profession, a profession that holds a virtual monopoly on legal service. I doubt the outlook of Comment 3 to our own Rule can be denied; it states: "...personal involvement in the problems of the disadvantaged can be one of the most rewarding experiences in the life of a lawyer." We, who are charged with upholding and advancing the Rule of Law, should value our ability to bring to the indigent the access to justice to which we all aspire.

The opportunities for pro bono service are numerous and often compelling. I urge you to fulfill your professional responsibility by contacting the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland. Visit its website at <http://www.probonomd.org>.