**Law Firm Pro Bono Policy**

The Pro Bono and Public Service Committee of the Washington State Bar Association, working under the belief that every law firm can benefit from a clear policy encouraging pro bono work by its employees, has created the following template policy for law firms in Washington state. This document is intended to be a starting point for the creation and adoption of such a policy, with the expectation that each law firm will customize the template to best reflect its strengths and goals. All law firms are welcome to reach out to the Pro Bono and Public Service Committee for assistance with finalizing and adopting a policy, or with identifying opportunities for pro bono work for the organization’s attorneys.

**[Law Firm]**

Pro Bono Policy

Adopted \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Over two million Washington households face significant legal challenges in a given year, and many of them are unable to access or afford an attorney’s assistance in navigating these problems. This disconnect is amplified for low-income families, who, according to a recent [Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study](https://ocla.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CivilLegalNeedsStudy_October2015_V21_Final10_14_15.pdf), receive beneficial legal assistance in just 24% of the instances in which they may require it. Foreclosure, residential eviction, job loss, bankruptcy, divorce, and health care issues are just a few of the challenges affecting low and moderate-income residents of Washington, and an inability to pay for qualified legal help contributes to a troubling deprivation of justice for this significant portion of our society. Although the Washington legal community has a long tradition of providing pro bono services, more must be done to address the unmet needs.

**[Firm Name]** (the “Firm”) believes that pro bono service is an essential component of every attorney’s professional career, and that the Firm has an opportunity and an obligation to assist those with the greatest need. The Firm acknowledges that individual lawyers meet their professional obligations to perform public interest legal service in a variety of ways, and does not explicitly require lawyers to participate in pro bono projects. Nonetheless, the Firm believes that participation in pro bono activities is beneficial for the public interest, for the Firm, and for individuals employed by the Firm.

**Pro Bono Aspirations**

According to Washington’s Rule of Professional Conduct (RPC) 6.1, “Every lawyer has a professional responsibility to assist in the provision of legal services to those unable to pay…and should aspire to render at least 30 hours of pro bono publico service per year.” Washington State, the American Bar Association Model Rules of Professional Conduct, and many other states have gone even further, adopting a 50-hour goal of pro bono work per year. Lawyers who report a minimum of 50 hours or more of pro bono work to the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) will receive commendation for such service. The Firm encourages all lawyers to dedicate a minimum of **[30/50/\_\_]** hours per year to pro bono work.

**Definition of Pro Bono**

The Firm adopts the description for pro bono work outlined in Washington’s Rule of Professional Conduct 6.1, which states that all attorneys should:

* 1. provide legal services without fee or expectation of fee to:
     1. persons of limited means or
     2. charitable, religious, civil, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters which are designed primarily to address the needs of persons of limited means; and
  2. provide pro bono publico service through:
     1. delivery of legal services at no fee or substantially reduced fee to individuals, groups or organizations seeking to secure or protect civil rights, or charitable, religious, civil, community, governmental and educational organizations in matters in furtherance of their organizational purposes, where the payment of standard legal fees would significantly deplete the organization's economic resources or would be otherwise inappropriate;
     2. delivery of legal services at a substantially reduced fee to persons of limited means; or
     3. participation in activities for improving the law, the legal system or the legal profession.

**Pro Bono Service Oversight**

Pro Bono Activities at the Firm are overseen by the Pro Bono Coordinator. The Pro Bono Coordinator’s responsibilities include:

* reviewing potential conflicts of interest;
* approving pro bono cases and projects to be undertaken by the Firm;
* reviewing and authorizing reduced-fee or sliding scale billing arrangements for moderate means clients;
* coordinating cooperation among Firm lawyers and the use of Firm resources for pro bono cases and projects; and
* reviewing lawyer and staff billing and timekeeping associated with pro bono cases and projects.

**Pro Bono Client Representation Standard**

The Firm is committed to providing the same high quality of representation to all clients regardless of their ability to pay. The Firm’s conflict of interest policy applies to all pro bono cases and projects. Pro bono cases and projects should be given the same staffing, attention, and resources as any other project. Attorneys should possess the knowledge and expertise required for success on any project, including pro bono cases and projects. Attorneys working on pro bono cases and projects outside their area of expertise should seek guidance, training, or supervision from attorneys with the requisite expertise.

**Pro Bono Opportunities**

The Firm encourages attorneys to consider participating in pro bono work via a [qualified legal services provider (“QLSP”)](https://www.wsba.org/connect-serve/volunteer-opportunities/psp) recognized by the WSBA. QLSPs are established programs that often offer fully integrated volunteer opportunities, including training, staffing and resources, MCLE credits, and in some cases malpractice coverage. Other examples of pro bono opportunities include teaching a pro bono CLE, serving on bar association boards or committees mentoring pro bono attorneys, advocating changing laws that impede access to justice for those of low or moderate means, advising an organization that serves communities experiencing poverty and inequities, or taking a case on a reduced-fee, sliding scale basis of a client of moderate means in the areas of family, consumer and housing law through the WSBA Moderate Means Program.

**Credit for Pro Bono Service**

The Firm will count, as credited “billable hours,” up to **[number]** hours per calendar year spent on pro bono legal services upon prior approval by the Pro Bono Coordinator. While non-participation in pro bono cases and projects will not adversely affect Firm lawyers, participation in pro bono work may be used as a factor in evaluations, advancement, or bonuses. The Firm also recognizes participation in pro bono activities **[at Firm meetings and awards ceremonies, in its annual reports and newsletters, and/or with gift cards and donations]**.

**[Optional Paragraph]**

**Benefits of Pro Bono Service**

There are many benefits of doing pro bono work which include:

* helping to meet critical legal needs and gaining satisfaction by giving back to the community;
* building the attorney’s legal skills and knowledge;
* networking with other attorneys and leaders to enhance individual professional development and to amplify the Firm’s commitment to pro bono; and
* if the attorney does pro bono work through a QLSP recognized by the WSBA, the attorney can receive additional benefits including:
  + one CLE credit hour for every hour of pro bono work (maximum 24 per reporting period);
  + access to free online CLEs focused on pro bono topics;
  + training specific to the pro bono case or project; and
  + malpractice insurance for the pro bono case.