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Access to Justice Support Proj

The ABA Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants & The National Legal Aid and Defender Association Congratulate the Winners of the 2005 Harrison Tweed Award!

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2005 Harrison Tweed Award Recognizes the Lafayette Parish, New York State and Cleveland Bar Associations

The Lafayette Parish Bar Association (Louisiana), the New York State Bar Association and the Cleveland Bar Association will each receive the 2005 Harrison Tweed Award for achievement in preserving and increasing access to legal services for the poor.



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Lafayette Parish Bar Association (LA)

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The Lafayette Parish Bar Association (LPBA) is being honored for its successful efforts in raising funds for the provision of civil legal services to the poor. These efforts were undertaken by the Lafayette Outreach for Civil Justice (LOCJ), which was established to specifically benefit the Lafayette Volunteer Lawyers and Acadiana Legal Services, the principal providers of free civil legal services in Lafayette Parish.

This fundraising campaign is the vision of leaders within the LPBA who recognized the need for private sources of funding for civil legal aid. The LOCJ was chaired by two former presidents of the LPBA and included a committee of 25 respected attorneys from all segments of the bar. An annual giving campaign was established and in its first year raised approximately \$275,000 in pledges for a three year period. Given the fact that the LPBA is a voluntary bar of 800 members, the campaign has been a resounding success. Funds raised to date have been used to enable the Lafayette Volunteer Lawyers to expand its level of services, while providing Acadiana Legal Services with much needed additional staff.

While the dollars raised by the LOCJ are essential to achieving the goal of access to justice in Lafayette Parish, just as significant is how the campaign has affected the overall legal community. There is a new sense of pride by members of the bar

and a renewed commitment to pro bono and legal services. In addition, legal services attorneys are taking a more active role in bar activities and are engaging in more cooperative projects with the Lafayette Volunteer Lawyers, a project of the LPBA.

New York State Bar Association

The New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) is being recognized for its leadership role in developing statewide standards to ensure the quality of mandated representation. The impetus for this action was a grave concern that financially strapped county governments might sacrifice quality services for the least expensive means of providing counsel.

In New York, each county is authorized to choose one or a combination of several options for providing representation mandated by the U.S Constitution, state constitution and various statutes: a public defender office, a private legal aid bureau or the assignment of private practitioners pursuant to an assigned counsel plan. While the rates for assigned counsel had been woefully inadequate for many years, the state legislature finally increased them in 2004. Though this legislation promised some financial assistance to counties, it was unclear in what amount or by what method that assistance would be delivered. As a result, some local governments that utilized assigned counsel plans began looking for the lowest-cost provider option without statewide guidance regarding the provision of quality representation.

To address this problem, the NYSBA created the Special Committee to Ensure Quality of Mandated Representation. Given the urgency of the concern, the Special Committee embarked on an intensive effort in record time to develop comprehensive standards to guarantee that every indigent person entitled to the appointment of counsel received meaningful and effective representation. Proposed standards were issued in March 2005 and addressed critical issues such as independence, qualification and training, workloads, support services and resources, performance, compensation, and quality assurance. On April 2, 2005, the NYSBA House of Delegates adopted the Standards for Providing Mandated Representation, essentially as drafted by the Special Committee.

Cleveland Bar Association (OH)

The Cleveland Bar Association (CBA) is being honored for its initiatives to increase pro bono participation and improve the delivery and coordination of pro bono legal services. The CBA launched a three-prong, interrelated campaign that has been highly successful and has created much excitement and energy within the legal community.

“Our Commitment to Our Community” (OCTOC) is a pledge campaign established to increase pro bono service among Cleveland’s law firms, law departments and individual lawyers. Each participant makes a commitment to provide a specific project with a specific number of hours of pro bono or community service, as well as to track and report their hours of service. In addition, law firms agree to follow “core principles,” which include creating a pro bono budget, providing billable hour credit for pro bono activities and encouraging lawyers at all seniority levels and practice areas to participate. In just the first six months of the campaign, 28 law firms, three law departments and numerous individual lawyers – representing over 2,000 lawyers – pledged 71,300 hours in pro bono and public service for calendar year 2005.

This increased commitment to pro bono service enabled existing pro bono programs to be expanded. It also led to the CBA's collaborative project with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland to develop and organize new pro bono clinical programs. In addition, the CBA convened the Pro Bono Improvement Task Force, which is composed of representatives from various pro bono providers in the community. The Task Force works on breaking down barriers in communication among providers, promoting cooperative approaches to service delivery and to understanding and responding to the volunteer needs of each provider.

"They have been invaluable over the years in providing pro bono legal services, and their most recent efforts, Pro Bono for Nonprofits and Project PillowTex, are creative and innovative approaches to the newly identified legal problems confronting their community."

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