

The Volunteer Attorney Program Serves the Public

"The need for increased pro bono has never been more acute than now,"

said Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman at a recent program of the Historical Society of the New York Courts at the New York City Bar entitled Pro Bono: New York Lawyers and Public Service. "Pro bono provides lifelong practical experience and may be the most meaningful and impactful attorneys can take on," added Chief Judge Lippman.



With the slowdown in the economy, the reported number of litigants who must represent themselves has sharply increased in recent years. New York State courts' Volunteer Attorney Program is a free service that makes legal advice and limited representation accessible.

Under the supervision of court staff, volunteer attorneys spend a full day or part of a day in a courthouse. They field questions and inquiries, fill out petitions and other court forms, prepare for court hearings and review court orders.

"Ninety-nine percent of litigants are extremely appreciative and grateful,"

says one attorney who has done pro bono work primarily in housing court.

attorneys are able to select the court at which they wish to serve and the types of cases on which they wish to consult. Pro bono service could focus on consumer debt or matrimonial cases, in which 97% of parents are unrepresented in custody disputes, or might mean assisting tenants in disputes with landlords. Help for tenants may come in the form of the creation of realistic rent payment plans, reviewing tenants' rights and help preventing the loss of homes.

In 2012, the New York State Court of Appeals adopted a new rule requiring applicants for admission to the New York State Bar to perform

"I am finally able to do what I thought I would do with my law degree...With very little effort on our part as attorneys, we can be a big help to litigants,"

says another attorney who always wanted to do pro bono and has volunteered largely in family court.

50 hours of pro bono services. Those law students are eligible to participate in the program.

The court system provides free training, with CLE credit. Attorneys can volunteer just a few hours a week or as frequently as every day on a schedule convenient for them. For more information, email: volunteerattorneys@nycourts.gov, call 646.386.4205 or fax Volunteer Attorney Program at 212-374-5709.