

PRO BONO Profile.....

Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland

520 W. Fayette St.
Baltimore, MD
21201

(410) 837-9379
(800) 492-1964

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Ruling Highlights Value of Pro Bono Mentors

By Adrienne Hagepanos -

Pro bono legal service, usually provided by attorneys in free legal advice clinics or through direct representation of indigent clients, may also come in the form of expert mentorship. Pro bono mentors are attorneys who concentrate in a particular field of the law who offer their time and knowledge to assist others in the representation of clients who cannot afford necessary legal services. A recent decision of the Court of Appeals of Maryland in a case brought by the House of Ruth, a non-profit legal services organization dedicated to assisting victims of domestic violence, illustrates just how critical this pro bono mentoring assistance can be.

In *Henriquez v. Henriquez*, the Court of Appeals upheld an award of counsel fees to the House of Ruth in a case involving child custody, support and visitation, and made it clear that attorneys' fees may be awarded directly to a legal services organization even though those fees were not "incurred" by the pro bono client. The House of Ruth attorneys on the case, Deena Hausner and Ashley Sikora, credit the success of their arguments not only to diligence and preparation, but also to the expert advice and assistance of their mentors throughout the appellate process. Those pro bono mentors were attorneys Shannon E. Avery (now the Honorable Shannon Avery) and Patricia Weaver of Paley, Rothman, Goldstein, Rosenberg, Eig & Cooper, Chartered.

The time donated by attorneys Weaver and Avery in the *Henriquez* case was described as "invaluable" by the House of Ruth counsel. Deena Hausner and Ashley Sikora were co-counsel for Mrs. Anna Henriquez for the duration of the appellate process in the Court of Special Appeals and Court of Appeals. At the suggestion of their Director of Legal Services, Dorothy Lennig, they contacted Avery and Weaver for mentorship. Both Hausner and Sikora attribute the success of their arguments to their mentors' assistance in organizing and drafting appellate briefs, mooted their arguments and lending the experience of practicing before the appellate courts. According to Hausner,

"Both (Avery and Weaver) donated about 30 hours to the appeals on this case. At one point, Ms. Weaver even assisted via telephone while on vacation. We couldn't have done these appeals without them."

Judge Avery was admitted to the bar in 1992 and has a long history of assisting the indigent and working for the victims of domestic violence. As a young lawyer, she assisted in opening the first Protection Order Advocacy office in the District Courthouse, and she has been active in the advocacy of the indigent throughout her career. Avery was appointed to the Baltimore City District Court in July of this year by Gov. Martin O'Malley.

A graduate of the University of Maryland School of Law, Weaver became a Maryland attorney in 1991. She has assisted the House of Ruth in several cases, including *Henriquez*, and plans to continue her pro bono mentorship. Weaver is also the current president of the Montgomery County Bar Foundation, the organization responsible for placing pro bono cases in Montgomery County.

The *Henriquez* decision will have an impact not only on the House of Ruth, but also on the other legal services providers and pro bono programs in Maryland. In the pro bono services world, where funding is always limited, rolling attorneys' fees awards back into a program will enable legal services and pro bono organizations to provide more comprehensive counseling and resources to their clients. It is fortunate for the entire non-profit legal services community that the House of Ruth attorneys had the advice and guidance of their dedicated pro bono mentors to assist them in the *Henriquez* case.

Support pro bono work in your community. Add your resources to the fight. For more information on civil legal service volunteer opportunities in Maryland, contact Jennifer Larrabee at the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (PBRC) at (410) 837-9379 or (800) 396-1274, or e-mail jlarrabee@probonomd.org.

Adrienne Hagepanos is Project Assistant for the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland.