

## Pro Bono Pledge Ireland

**We believe** that universal access to justice and legal service is essential to the rule of law, to the vindication of rights, and to the functioning of democratic society. Many, especially low income, disadvantaged, and marginalised people, cannot get access to justice because they cannot afford legal service.

**We recognise** that the legal profession has a privileged role and a unique purpose and position in the legal system, in society, and in matters of justice. This gives us the means and opportunity, and therefore the duty, to promote and, in collaboration with civil society and others, to assist in securing access to justice and respect for human rights and the rule of law. An important part of this duty is providing legal services at no cost to those who cannot afford them, pro bono publico. The legal profession in Ireland and elsewhere has traditionally contributed to meeting otherwise unmet legal needs in this and other ways.

**We regard** the services provided by the Legal Aid Board as vital for individuals and families of limited means. Civil legal aid in Ireland, however, is not adequately resourced to bridge the gap in access to justice, leaving critical legal needs unmet. Pro bono legal services are not, nor can they be, a substitute for a properly funded system of legal aid.

**We define** pro bono legal services as legal services provided free of charge, and with no reasonable expectation of payment, to

Low income, disadvantaged or marginalised individuals and communities, who cannot afford to pay for effective legal services without incurring significant financial hardship, and whose legal needs would otherwise be unmet, and

Certain charitable, other non-profit groups and social enterprises that work with the groups identified above or for the public good,

Individuals and organisations on matters of public interest that may not otherwise be pursued.

We declare as follows:

Members of the legal profession have a responsibility to provide pro bono legal services.

Pro bono legal services should be provided with the same quality of service and standards of professional conduct as services to paying clients.

Members of the legal profession should co-operate with each other and with professional organisations, independent law centres, other civil society organisations, law schools and others to enhance the effectiveness and availability of pro bono legal services.

We commit that, in a manner consistent with our role in the legal profession:

We will endeavour to provide more than 20 hours of pro bono legal service per individual lawyer per year. For law firms and legal departments, we will endeavour to provide an average of more than 20 hours pro bono legal service per lawyer per year.

We will, in consultation with other signatories to this Pledge, review this target in 3 years with a view to increasing it.

We will collaborate with other signatories to this Pledge to improve the effectiveness and availability of pro bono legal services, including by sharing appropriate information and developing agreed guidance and protocols.

We will contribute data and case studies for annual reports on pro bono work in Ireland in accordance with an agreed protocol.

This Pledge is open for signature from November 2020 by solicitors, barristers, law firms and in-house legal departments in Ireland.