

Encouraging Pro Bono Engagement

AHLA's Young Professionals Council and the AHLA Public Interest Committee have collaborated to produce a multi-part interview series focused on encouraging pro bono engagement and acknowledging the important contributions that AHLA lawyers make to their communities.

Countless individuals, families, and organizations have benefitted from exceptional legal expertise on a pro bono basis. AHLA attorneys have also reaped benefits from the opportunity by honing legal skills, exposing themselves to new experiences, and feeling the satisfaction of giving selflessly to others. In this installment we speak with four attorneys:

- » **Mary Emma Karam** of Jackson Walker discusses her work with St. Joseph's Residence, a non-profit assisted living facility, and Catholic Charities of Dallas;
- » **Elizabeth Doyle O'Brien-Fabeny** from Reed Smith tells us about her work assisting our nation's veterans in accessing social, educational, and medical benefits to which they are entitled;
- » **René Quashie** of Epstein Becker & Green discusses using his specialized telemedicine expertise to benefit clients

such as La Clínica del Pueblo, a non-profit, federally qualified health center that serves the Latino and immigrant populations of the Washington DC metro area; and

- » **James Saling** from McDermott Will & Emery tells us about his work with the National Health Law Program advocating for the rights of low-income and underserved individuals and families.

As these engaged and giving health law attorneys reveal, providing services pro bono provides benefits to both the clients and the attorneys involved. To learn more about ways that you may become involved in pro bono work, please visit www.healthlawyers.org/probono. Additionally, if you know someone who has been actively involved in pro bono service and would be interested in sharing their experiences for future articles, please contact me.



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Mary Emma Karam

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Interviewed by:
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Mary Emma (Ackels) Karam (mkaram@jw.com) has practiced law at Jackson Walker for more than 30 years, providing practical advice and strategic thinking to clients in a wide range of legal matters. Her current practice consists of counseling clients on health care implications and strategies; representing various organizations as outside general counsel and coordinator of legal work; and consulting in litigation, banking, real estate, and corporate matters involving emerging health care issues in the marketplace. She is regarded as an expert in managed care and served a term as outside counsel to the Texas Attorney General's office for health care/managed care matters. She also advises employers on contracts that make up their health benefit offering.

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- 1 What was your initial involvement in pro bono?**
I grew up in a family where service is regarded as a way of



life. It is something that you do every day, so becoming involved in pro bono work as an attorney was a natural extension of that. My personal philosophy is that you can be a successful attorney and a rainmaker and still render pro bono services for worthwhile causes without the expectation of getting anything back for your services. I'm passionate about giving back to the community through charitable activities and pro bono work. I currently represent a number of pro bono clients, including St. Joseph's Residence, a non-profit assisted living facility, and Catholic Charities of Dallas, which provides programs that serve the poorest and most vulnerable people throughout North Texas.

2 How is your pro bono work different than your day-to-day work? How do you transition between the two?

I approach my pro bono work like any other client work. I don't make a distinction between the two, except to put a zero charge on the bill. I don't skimp on time or give my pro bono clients my leftover time; I simply do what I would do for any other client. As in every aspect of my legal practice, I am dedicated to adding value for my clients by providing knowledgeable and strategic legal advice. From my perspective, there is no more important client than a pro bono client, and I treat my work that way. Using my experience, I now mentor young lawyers on how to serve clients in this way. Practicing law is really about service: serving your clients' needs because you care about them, reaching out to the community, forming lifetime bonds, giving back without getting something in return, doing work for those who can't afford an attorney.

3 What suggestions do you have for young attorneys who may be hesitant to get involved in pro bono activities because they feel they lack expertise?

My suggestion to young professionals is to stop thinking about the barriers and the road blocks to pro bono service; just go do it. Junior attorneys tend to assume that they don't know enough or will not be useful to a pro bono client, but young professionals shouldn't be afraid to take on pro bono causes. Even if you may not have the experience to serve on the board of a non-profit, young professionals can help in smaller ways. There are so many ways that people need help and, if you just look around, you will find ways to help. A great place to start is at your local legal clinic, or to look for a mission that interests you. If you just show up, there will be something you can do to help.

4 What are you most proud of?

I am most proud of the work that I have been able to do that has had a direct impact on individual people. Sometimes in our legal work, we don't get to work directly with people at a local level of need. Changing lives at the grassroots level is

so much more meaningful. Much of my pro bono work is in the health care arena, but not all of it. For example, I worked with a local grade school in an area with limited resources that didn't have access to the most basic of supplies like crayons and up-to-date text books. We form a group for the school made up of professional people. We were able to work with the community to help the school find more recent books, desks, and other essential items. When it comes to my pro bono work, like the local schools or St. Joseph's Residence, I get to see the people who are the direct beneficiaries of my legal work, and there is nothing more rewarding than that.

5 Did your firm or St. Joseph's Residence and/or Catholic Charities of Dallas provide any additional training that helped you?

As a seasoned lawyer practicing for over 30 years, I have the experience necessary to deal with a variety of issues that affect my pro bono clients. However, if there is a situation where I get a question that is outside of my area of expertise, I seek out an expert in that area to assist, and I try to find that resource at no cost to my client. I try not to operate outside of my skill set, because that is where more lawyers get into trouble—when they operate outside of their area of expertise. Being a good attorney for your pro bono clients consists of the basics—good judgment, resources, and knowing where and how to find the answers your client needs. For more junior attorneys, there are a variety of resources and trainings that you can access, like local legal aid services.

6 How many hours do you spend on pro bono matters each year?

Pro bono work is the most humbling and most rewarding work you can do. Currently, I dedicate about 200 hours per year to pro bono work. For the past several years, I have been a member of the State Bar of Texas, Pro Bono College.

7 How does your firm encourage attorneys to engage in pro bono?

My firm is proud to have its attorneys engage in pro bono work and does not discourage this work, but it is up to the individual attorney to take the initiative to become involved. The firm will commit dollars and sponsorships to support non-profit initiatives of its attorneys. Although not the goal, pro bono work can lead to billable work. The best way to make strong and trusting relationships is to help someone else with the expectation of receiving nothing in return. Clients come from good, strong relationships, and there is no better way to form such relationships.