I have yet to meet a Pennsylvania Bar Association lawyer who doesn't support the public service of lawyers. That commitment to public service is one of the reasons why I am so engaged with our bar. The lawyers are dedicated and sincere about advancing our mission, which includes providing legal services to those who cannot afford a lawyer. As I traveled this past year, I met with bar presidents and committee and section chairs and heard their earnest enthusiasm for serving the public good. I felt connected with them in their journey and I will continue to advance their work where possible.

Pro Bono Lawyers Do It for Free
I've traveled all over the commonwealth, acknowledging and celebrating the various ways lawyers volunteer their time and expertise for low-income members of the community. Bar associations take pride in their efforts to promote pro bono and help community members with their custody, unemployment compensation, landlord-tenant and other critical cases. This year marks the 31st year that the PBA Legal Services to the Public Committee has presented pro bono awards. In May 2003, the PBA adopted the Task Force Report on Legal Services to the Needy II (available on the PBA website). Those recommendations include bar associations and the judiciary working together to encourage and require the reporting of pro bono work in the community.

A prime example of the judiciary working with the bar can be found in Wayne County. Wayne County Bar Association members unanimously adopted a pro bono plan, an outcome that was partially due to the commitment of Wayne County President Judge Janine Edwards. That kind of enthusiastic support for pro bono goes a long way in the effort to provide access to justice for the poor. Thank you to all the pro bono attorneys, to the Wayne County Bar Association and to President Judge Edwards for their concerted and unanimous effort to promote pro bono!

Government Lawyers Protect Our Resources, Democracy and the Rule of Law
Over the course of my legal career, I have worked as a pro bono lawyer, a legal services attorney and a government attorney. My time at the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) made me understand on a deeper level the commitment of government lawyers to public service and sacrifice so that our legal system works well. Without government attorneys like outgoing Young Lawyers Division Chair Jonathan Koltash, a member of the Office of General Counsel in the Pennsylvania Department of Health, we would not have clarity about implementation of new laws, such as the medical marijuana statutes. Government lawyers provide a critical role in implementing the law and protecting the rights of individuals and entities in the process.

At the PHRC, I met and worked with lawyers like Chief Counsel Kathy Morrison and Assistant Chief Counsel Martin Cunningham, without whom Pennsylvanians’ civil rights would not be enforced. The law is not self-implementing and government lawyers make the law reality. The thoughtful, committed work they do helps us understand and abide by the rule of law. The rule of law is the foundation of our democracy. Thank you, government attorneys!

Public Interest Lawyers Advocate for the Issue
I served as Pennsylvania senior attorney for the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) during the second phase of my legal career. I came from a legal services office, so my focus had been on the individual client and achieving the client’s desired outcome with the resources we both had. When I arrived at the PCADV, I had to identify my client in a different way. Was my client my employer? Were my clients the shelters we funded throughout the commonwealth? Were my clients the advocates I trained? No, my client was the issue and goal of my employer’s mission — ending domestic violence. When your client is an issue, you must learn to think of the permutations and principles that impact the issue. I often thought of the unintended consequences of actions and policies. There always were unintended consequences. However, that type of thinking can freeze you into not acting. I had to identify the means of mitigating any harm that resulted from the poli-
If you’re a PBA member and you want the legal community to know about your appointment, promotion, recent speaking event or other law-related news, why not submit your announcement to run as a “People” item?

The most frequent types of “People” announcements we run are for appointments/elections, awards/honors, being published, firm moves and speaking engagements. We run items on recipients of county bar awards, but we do not list county bar committee and section appointments. We do not run prospective notices, particularly for speaking or meeting events, as these are subject to change, and we do not include lawyer and law-firm “best of” announcements. Given the PBA’s large member base, we also monitor for how frequently individuals are listed in the column. Photos are welcome, black and white or color. If provided electronically, photos should be high resolution. Most electronic photos we receive are as JPEG files.

The editors reserve the right to reject “People” submissions and to edit for style and length of announcement. Accepted announcements will appear in either the PBA’s Pennsylvania Lawyer magazine or Pennsylvania Bar News tabloid, depending on when notices are received in the editorial cycle.

Email “People” column notices to editor@pabar.org or mail to the Pennsylvania Bar Association, Attn: People Column, 100 South St., P.O. Box 186, Harrisburg, Pa. 17108-0186.

Legal Service Lawyers Represent and Educate the Poor About Their Rights and Remedies

Legal services offices are the emergency rooms of the legal world. The problems never stop coming in the door. The solutions are targeted at “stopping the bleeding” or reducing the risk at hand. The resources are limited. According to a Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) Report, there are 1.9 million Pennsylvanians living in poverty. Legal services organizations provide services and representation to those who are income eligible. However, only 66,172 people were served in Pennsylvania in fiscal year 2016-17 via PLAN-funded programs. We can never meet the need for pro bono services. A commitment to legal services funding is essential if we are to address the systemic issues of access to justice for the poor. I know this is true because my first legal career was as a legal services intern, followed by service as a staff attorney and later as a senior legal services attorney.

My first legal services boss was Sam Milkes, now the PLAN executive director. When Sam hired me, he was the managing attorney for the Lancaster office of Central Pennsylvania Legal Service, now known as MidPenn Legal Services. He put me to work right away. I shadowed attorneys inspecting conditions at the Lancaster County Prison. I prepared unemployment cases for hearings. I attended conferences on juvenile justice and child dependency where I learned about the important connection between resources and children and youth services. Sam not only gave me a chance at succeeding in my new legal career, he gave me a legal home base filled with passionate, committed attorneys who
took me under their wings and taught me what they could. I never had a doubt about who my client was or what my position was when I worked there.

Sam also taught me the importance of connection with the local and state bar associations. As a young lawyer member of the Lancaster Bar Association, I worked on developing a pro se custody clinic with the other Young Lawyers Division members. I served on various committees and learned that collaboration and education went hand in hand. Legal services office relationships improved because of bar association involvement and, therefore, my client with emergency legal issues benefited. Leaders and mentors like Sam Milkes help the PBA expand its reach to a legal community of organized lawyers who keep the promise of access to justice a reality. I am so grateful I had the privilege of serving with Sam and many other legal service attorneys who continue to instruct me along the way.

Conclusion: Public Service is an Opportunity to Help and Learn

Everything you do as a lawyer promoting the public good helps our democracy and helps the most needy among us. Perhaps not all of us can provide pro bono, but we can donate to our bar programs. Perhaps not all of us can serve as government attorneys, but we can create a meaningful space for them in our bar associations. Perhaps not all of us can serve in a public interest law firm, but we can engage those lawyers in our issues and learn from their expertise. Perhaps not all of us can serve as legal services attorneys, but we can advocate for legal services funding on national, state and local levels. I know the PBA is filled with attorneys who are committed to improving the public good and for that I am so grateful to have served as your president this year!

Thank you! 😊

Sharon R. López
PBA President

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MAY 9  Camp Hill
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MAY 15  Philadelphia, Live Webcast & Simulcast
8:30 am-12:45 pm
The CLE Conference Ctr., Wanamaker Building
Simulcast Sites: Allentown, Altoona, Beaver, Bellefonte, Butler, Chambersburg, Erie, Greensburg, Honesdale, Indiana, Johnstown, Mansfield, Meadville, New Castle, Plymouth Meeting, Reading, Scranton, Stroudsburg, Uniontown, Warren, Wilkes-Barre

MAY 24  Pittsburgh
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David L Lawrence Conv. Ctr., 1000 Ft. Duquesne Blvd

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