

Making a Difference

The Pennsylvania Bar News column that highlights Pennsylvania attorneys who make a difference in their communities by providing extraordinary pro bono service and/or other legal services in the public interest.

Michael B. Lee, Philadelphia

Solo practitioner Michael B. Lee is a co-founder and member of Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE), a non-profit legal aid organization that provides direct pro bono legal service, legal education workshops and advocates, according to Lee, “to help those most impacted by injustice become their own advocates for change.” The Criminal Record Expungement Project, C-REP, the first pro bono project of PLSE, is dedicated to working with the community to reduce the collateral consequences of criminal records.

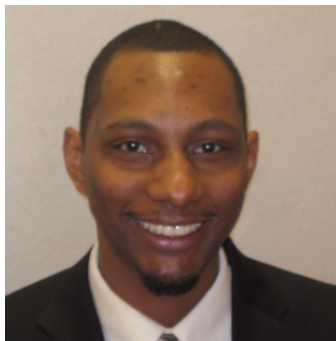
Describe your pro bono work:

C-REP works for a more just approach to criminal recordkeeping and access to

employment and public benefits. As the supervising attorney for C-REP, I have argued almost 3,000 expungement and partial-expungement petitions in the court of common pleas. I also conduct community events to educate the public and the legal community on the expungement process and to advocate for criminal record policy reform.

Why do you participate in pro bono?

The privilege of practicing law comes with a great responsibility centered on the role of law in preserving social justice and our



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social order. I believe our current social order is not just. I participate in pro bono service to promote social order from social justice.

How did you become involved?

In listening to the community, I and three other young attorneys realized a need to address the criminal and civil harms created by arrest records. An expungement is an empowering first step toward helping someone achieve independence and become a productive member of society.

Have your pro bono cases dealt with legal issues different from your regular practice?

No. I practice criminal defense.

What have been the personal rewards?

My reward is raising someone’s self-esteem by lowering the barriers he or she may face in obtaining meaningful access to employment, housing or benefits. An expungement hearing is often the first positive interaction someone may have with the government. It is very rewarding to see how uplifting that can be.