

The New York City Bar Association's Pro Bono & Legal Services Committee [1966-1970]

Chairs: Herbert Prem and Hon. Harold Baer, Jr.

NEW YORK
CITY BAR

In 1966, the NYC Bar Committee on Pro Bono and Legal Services was born. The founding name was "Committee on Legal Assistance," and the founding co-chairs through that era were F. Herbert Prem, Jr. and Harold Baer, Jr.

In the words of City Bar President, Samuel Rosenman, as he recognized the responsibility of the private bar to advocate for legal services for low income people:

In the President's report, he called for the need to create a legal assistance program, "... the provision of legal services for those who cannot now afford them – the defense of the defenseless. No more difficult problem, no more shining opportunity, no program more important to the future of the bar will arise in our lifetime."

Major Initiatives:

- Creation of legal services programs
- Recruiting pro bono lawyers for representation of individual clients served by civil legal services
- Joint Appeals Program which between September, 1968 and June, 1969 handled approximately 50 direct appeals from judgment.
- Legislative Reform in the area of Consumer Protection "further steps to assure the protection of consumers are an important part of efforts to promote order and justice and to deal with the continuing crisis of our cities. "
- Training for lawyers interested in serving on 18B panel
- Training for lawyers interested in representing low income clients (both for neighborhood law office staff and volunteers) through a series of eleven lectures on "Poverty Law"
- Expansion of law student participation in pro bono work

Issued the following reports:

- Survey on consumer fraud leading to a report entitled: "Does a Vendee Under An Installment Sales Contract Receive Adequate Notice of Suit Instituted by a Vendor."
- "Blueprint for Change" suggested five urgently needed legislative reforms in the area of consumer protection.
- The committee studied physical facilities of the Criminal Court and the effect of those facilities on the overall treatment of prisoners.
- "Poverty Law and the Volunteer" "With talk of state and national budgets being trimmed, more and more emphasis will be placed upon such programs." From the report, these ingredients of a successful volunteer program are mentioned: Perseverance; maximum personal contact with the volunteer; begin on a small scale and grow slowly; build into program an ongoing channel of communication between volunteers and directors; and provide the know-how and tools so that the volunteer can do a competent job. "We hope the experience will be useful in developing other successful volunteer programs."

Note: In committee reports and other official records of the committee's work, no reference is made to pro bono work, as such. However, the work by lawyers on behalf of clients who cannot afford lawyers is referred to as volunteer work.