

August 2, 2021

Dana L. Salazar, Esq.
President
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Rensselaer County Bar Association
PO Box 395
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Dear Ms. Salazar,

We are writing to encourage you and your members to become involved in the New York State Attorney Emeritus Program (AEP) this year. The AEP is an initiative of the New York State Court system to promote pro bono civil legal service by senior attorneys. The Program was spearheaded by former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman and enthusiastically endorsed by Chief Judge Janet DiFiore. There is an acute need for pro bono legal service to ensure the fair administration of justice in our courts and to assist individuals who cannot afford lawyers. New York's civil justice gap has widened appreciably in the wake of the many devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we know, there has been a surge in demand for civil legal services in numerous practice areas, including: housing, consumer debt and bankruptcy, access to unemployment and subsistence benefits, end-of-life planning, and domestic matters, to name just a few. Senior attorneys volunteering through the AEP provide critical access to justice for New Yorkers confronting essentials of life challenges; the impact of this pro bono work is often life altering for individuals and families in need.

Any lawyer, aged fifty-five or older, retired or still in practice, who is in good standing and has practiced for at least ten years, can help those in need by registering as Attorney Emeritus on the biennial registration form or by applying online. Attorney Emeritus volunteers commit to performing 60 hours of pro bono work with an approved legal services organization or court program over the two-year attorney registration period. The AEP collaborates with 67 host organizations across the state to identify remote and in-person volunteer opportunities. In addition to the satisfaction of helping someone in need, there are incentives for enrolling in the AEP. A benefit for practicing attorneys who register as Emeritus is the ability to obtain up to 15 CLE credits for performing civil pro bono work with approved providers in accordance with the CLE rules. Also, AEP volunteers who complete the required 60 hours of pro bono work over their biennial registration period will receive special recognition from Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives Edwina G. Mendelson.

We are pleased to provide support and assistance to bar associations wishing to recognize members who volunteer through the AEP during the 2021 Pro Bono Week from October 24 to 30. If you do recognize AEP volunteers, we would greatly appreciate your letting us know so that we can share the information with AEP stakeholders, Chief Judge DiFiore and Judge Mendelson.

We hope your association will join with the New York State Bar Association and other bar associations to promote Emeritus status by notifying your members about the AEP and the critical need for pro bono legal assistance. Several associations have done so by circulating this information in newsletters, emails, and at annual meetings. Some of your lawyers over 55 years old are undoubtedly providing vital pro bono service currently. By changing their registration to Emeritus, they add their names to the ranks of those from your bar association who are publicly committed to help--particularly in these times of increasing need.

We have attached the Attorney Emeritus Program brochure with a Frequently Asked Questions page. More information on the AEP can be found at <http://www.nycourts.gov/attorneys/volunteer/emeritus/>. Please let us know if you would like any additional materials and/or speaker recommendations for any of your events. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the Program with you or your members; please feel free to contact the AEP Coordinator by email at AEPcoordinator@fordham.edu.

With your leadership and the help of your extraordinary membership, we can continue to mobilize a pool of senior lawyers willing and able to help meet the urgent need for civil legal services in New York State during these challenging times.

Sincerely yours,

John D. Feerick
Co-Chair, AEP Advisory Council

Fern Schair
Co-Chair, AEP Advisory Council