

A Q&A With State Bar of New Mexico President Aja N. Brooks on the Significance of Pro Bono Work



1. How has pro bono work shaped your career as a legal professional?

Pro bono has been vital to my career. I worked for New Mexico Legal Aid as the Pro Bono Coordinator for its Volunteer Attorney Program for many years and learned a lot about the gaps in representation that exist both nationally and in our state.

2. As the State Bar of New Mexico's 2025 President, your mission has been summarized by the theme: "Together Towards Justice." Do you believe there is a collective or communal spirit in pro bono work? If so, how?

Pro bono work is undoubtedly communal and part of our profession's obligation to better our communities. Most of us became attorneys because we want to give back, there's something unifying in achieving that purpose.

3. How would you say New Mexico's legal landscape uniquely benefits from attorneys engaged in pro bono representation?

Unfortunately, we have a disproportionate number of people experiencing poverty in our state. Pro bono (and low bono) attorneys help a large portion of our population who may not have the financial means to afford an attorney.

4. What is most rewarding to you about pro bono?

The best part of pro bono is knowing that you've done something to help someone who needs it. Not for money. Not for recognition. But because it's the right thing to do.

5. Do you believe there is still work to be done in improving the volume of pro bono service for New Mexicans in need of legal representation? If so, what tools/resources do you believe should be implemented to achieve higher levels of pro bono representation?

New Mexico is at the forefront of providing pro bono opportunities and coming up with creative ways to reach areas of the state where we may not have attorneys. However, in addition to increasing pro bono representation, I think we have to support our legal service organizations and the important work they do. Sometimes we forget that financial contributions are also an option.

6. What barriers do you think keep attorneys from doing pro bono work? Do you have any ideas as to how to overcome those barriers?

Barriers include the time-consuming demands of a legal career and everyday life. I think one way to overcome this is to prioritize pro bono work and treat it with the same importance as a case or a special project. We also need firms and legal organizations to allow their lawyers to engage in pro bono without being penalized.

7. How can new attorneys entering the legal profession get involved in pro bono work?

There are so many opportunities available! The State Bar of New Mexico Young Lawyers Division holds Wills For Heroes events all over the state, providing wills, advance healthcare directives and powers of attorney to first-responders. The New Mexico State Bar Foundation offers the ability to do brief services through the ABA's Free Legal Answers virtual legal advice portal. And New Mexico Legal Aid's Volunteer Attorney Program conducts statewide legal fairs and clinics as well as provides opportunities for attorneys to assist with direct representation cases.