



# Fort Bend Lawyers Care

## A Pro Bono Legal Organization

### July 24, 2010

The mission of Fort Bend Lawyers Care is to provide low-income Fort Bend County citizens with equal access to justice through volunteer lawyers.

## **MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE FBCBA - PRO BONO COMMITTEE**

The first meeting of the FBCBA - Pro Bono Committee was held at the office of John Millard on February 8, 2006 from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

The following committee members were present: John Millard, Matt Probus, Amanda Richards, James Kincade, Bob Thomas and Allan Cease.

John Millard called the meeting to order and reiterated the committee's goal of establishing a FBC pro bono services organization to provide legal services to needy citizens of our community, while enhancing the image of the bar and lawyers through community service. The committee discussed establishing a pro bono services organization to provide legal service to the needy in Fort Bend County. Initial pro bono program/service ideas included:

1. Volunteer Lawyer Service – this service will be the core of our pro bono program, providing much needed legal services to the poor of our county. The committee discussed initially providing lawyer volunteers to existing organizations such as:

- a. Fort Bend County Women's Center
- b. Arc of Fort Bend County
- c. Lone Star Legal Aid

John Millard will contact each of these organizations to learn more about their operations and needs, how our organizations can work together to provide legal services to the needy, and how these organizations can assist us in establishing our pro bono services organization.

2. Legal Line – the committee discussed establishing a "legal line" service to provide callers with advice regarding a variety of legal issues. The service will be manned by volunteer lawyers once a month during evening hours. Matt Probus will research existing programs such as the HBA's Legal Line service to learn more about the logistics and procedures for manning a legal line service, and will also look into potential facilities to host the service and ways to promote the service.

3. Lawyer Referral Service – the committee discussed establishing a lawyer referral service to benefit both citizens and attorneys in FBC. James Kincade will contact existing referral services to learn more about the logistics and procedures for establishing and manning this service, hosting and staffing, and promoting the service. James Kincade will also look into the legalities and pros/cons of charging fees for attorneys participating in the service and how income can be generated to help fund our pro bono services organization.

4. Elder Law Education Program – the committee discussed establishing a service to educate senior citizens regarding the unique legal issues and challenges they face. This program will provide a panel of lawyers with expertise regarding issues seniors face. The service will probably provide monthly seminar, rotating among different area senior centers and retirement communities. The committee discussed how this program may be attractive to lawyers practicing in these areas as it could result fee business. This program can also be used as a tool to help promote the FBCBA “Will-A-Thon”.

Several other pro bono/community relations ideas were discussed including scholarship programs, educational programs, peer mediation training for junior high students through the SBOT MAP program, pamphlets on legal subjects, and a “Guardian Angel” program whereby volunteer ad litem agree to donate their fees to different charitable organizations such as The Rainbow Room, the Fort Bend County Women’s Center, and our own pro bono services program. However, the committee decided to table formation of these additional services until the other programs are establish and are successfully underway.

The committee acknowledged that the success of our pro bono programs will depend largely on having sufficient lawyer volunteers to provide legal services. Alan Cease will investigate methods and ideas for recruiting volunteers (and giving incentive for their service) and for coordinating the match between volunteers and our various pro bono programs.

The committee further acknowledged that the success of our program and the breadth of services we can provide will be influenced heavily by the availability of funds to run our program. Amanda Richards will investigate the availability of public funds to operate our programs and will contact potentials sources of funding including the Houston Bar Foundation, Texas Bar Foundation, Texas Equal Access to Justice Foundation, SBOT, as well as private corporate sponsors.

The committee discussed how to organize our pro bono services, and it was decided that our programs may best be administered under the umbrella of a new, separate non-profit legal entity. The committee further discussed naming the committee “Fort Bend Lawyers Care” (FBLC), although the committee is open to other suggestions for naming the organization. Bob Thomas will investigate the best means of organizing the entity and will also interface with the FBCBA Board of Directors to discuss the pros/cons and logistics of organizing a new entity.

The committee agreed to meet again Wednesday, February 22, 2006 at 5:30 p.m. at the office of John Millard to further discuss establishing our pro bono services organization. There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned.

John Millard  
Chairman



**Fort Bend Lawyers Care followed these steps in establishing our pro bono program.**

1. Select a name for your organization
2. Become a 501(c)(3) organization
3. Draft a Board of Directors
4. Draft By-Laws
5. Hold monthly meetings during the first year
6. Open a bank account
7. Set up a phone number
8. Begin holding a Legal Line
9. Solicit donations of a computer and office supplies
10. Begin developing forms your organization will need. Don't "reinvent the wheel." Ask other agencies for help in this area.
11. Set up a website. Review other Pro Bono legal organizations websites for ideas.
12. Send out a press release announcing your services
13. Meet with your Bar association and the local judiciary to explain your program
14. Meet with Texas Access to Justice
15. Begin soliciting funds from your local Bar association, Texas Access to Justice, individual attorneys, local businesses, community leaders
16. Set up an Advisory Board
17. Meet with local non-profit agencies such as Women's shelters, Child Advocates, and Habitat for Humanity to be your strategic partners
18. Hold a fundraiser
19. After several months of successful Legal Lines, begin holding walk-in clinics
20. Set a goal of 1 year from inception to begin hiring staff. Start with a paid Executive Director
21. Meet with the Legal Service Corporation agency serving your county.
22. Hire an accountant and file a 990 at the end of the first year of operations.
23. Begin client/attorney matching for representation.
24. Be proactive to be sure assigned attorneys are handling their cases appropriately

**Your community and the lives of the low-income citizens of your county will be enriched by your efforts.**

## **Pro Bono Legal Services in Texas** **Sources of Funding and Information**

**Three major sources of funding and information for Pro Bono Legal Service agencies**

- 1. Federal Funds for civil legal aid for low income citizens are distributed through Legal Services Corporation (LSC). From the LSC website:**

**“LSC is the single largest provider of civil legal aid for the poor in the nation. Established in 1974, LSC operates as an independent 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that promotes equal access to justice and provides grants to high quality civil legal assistance to low-income Americans. LSC distributes more than 95% of its total funding to 136 nonprofit legal programs with more than 900 offices that provide legal assistance to low-income individuals and families throughout the nation.” In 2010, Texas received \$33,237,382.00 from LSC. Your first step is to contact the LSC funded agency that services your county.**

**A. Legal Aid of Northwest Texas**

Counties Served: Andrews County, Archer County, Armstrong County, Bailey County, Baylor County, Borden County, Briscoe County, Brown County, Callahan County, Carson County, Castro County, Childress County, Clay County, Cochran County, Coke County, Coleman County, Collin County, Collingsworth County, Comanche County, Concho County, Cooke County, Cottle County, Crane County, Crosby County, Dallam County, Dallas County, Dawson County, Deaf Smith County, Denton County, Dickens County, Donley County, Eastland County, Ector County, Ellis County, Erath County, Fannin County, Fisher County, Floyd County, Foard County, Gaines County, Garza County, Glasscock County, Gray County, Grayson County, Hale County, Hall County, Hansford County, Hardeman County, Hartley County, Haskell County, Hemphill County, Hockley County, Hood County, Howard County, Hunt County, Hutchinson County, Irion County, Jack County, Johnson County, Jones County, Kaufman County, Kent County, King County, Knox County, Lamb County, Lipscomb County, Loving County, Lubbock County, Lynn County, McCulloch County, Martin County, Menard County, Midland County, Mills County, Mitchell County, Montague County, Moore County, Motley County, Nolan County, Ochiltree County, Oldham County, Palo Pinto County, Parker County, Parmer County, Potter County, Randall County, Reagan County, Roberts County, Rockwall County, Runnels County, San Saba County, Schleicher County, Scurry County, Shackelford County, Sherman County, Somervell County, Stephens County, Sterling County, Stonewall County,

Swisher County, Tarrant County, Taylor County, Terry County, Throckmorton County, Tom Green County, Upton County, Ward County, Wheeler County, Wichita County, Wilbarger County, Winkler County, Wise County, Yoakum County, Young County

**B. Lone Star Legal Aid**

Counties Served: Anderson County, Angelina County, Austin County, Bell County, Bosque County, Bowie County, Brazoria County, Brazos County, Burleson County, Camp County, Cass County, Chambers County, Cherokee County, Colorado County, Coryell County, Delta County, Falls County, Fayette County, Fort Bend County, Franklin County, Freestone County, Galveston County, Gregg County, Grimes County, Hamilton County, Hardin County, Harris County, Harrison County, Henderson County, Hill County, Hopkins County, Houston County, Jasper County, Jefferson County, Lamar County, Lampasas County, Lee County, Leon County, Liberty County, Limestone County, McLennan County, Madison County, Marion County, Matagorda County, Milam County, Montgomery County, Morris County, Nacogdoches County, Navarro County, Newton County, Orange County, Panola County, Polk County, Rains County, Red River County, Robertson County, Rusk County, Sabine County, San Augustine County, San Jacinto County, Shelby County, Smith County, Titus County, Trinity County, Tyler County, Upshur County, Van Zandt County, Walker County, Waller County, Washington County, Wharton County, Wood County

**C. Texas RioGrande Legal Aid**

Counties Served: Aransas County, Atascosa County, Bandera County, Bastrop County, Bee County, Bexar County, Blanco County, Brewster County, Brooks County, Burnet County, Caldwell County, Calhoun County, Cameron County, Comal County, Crockett County, Culberson County, DeWitt County, Dimmit County, Duval County, Edwards County, El Paso County, Frio County, Gillespie County, Goliad County, Gonzales County, Guadalupe County, Hays County, Hidalgo County, Hudspeth County, Jackson County, Jeff Davis County, Jim Hogg County, Jim Wells County, Karnes County, Kendall County, Kenedy County, Kerr County, Kimble County, Kinney County, Kleberg County, La Salle County, Lavaca County, Live Oak County, Llano County, McMullen County, Mason County, Maverick County, Medina County, Nueces County, Pecos County, Presidio County, Real County, Reeves County, Refugio County, San Patricio County, Starr County, Sutton County, Terrell County, Travis County, Uvalde County, Val Verde County, Victoria County, Webb County,

Willacy County, Williamson County, Wilson County, Zapata County, Zavala County, Native Americans living on the Eagle Pass/Kickapoo Reservation.

## 2. Texas Access to Justice Foundation <http://www.teajf.org/>

**The Texas Access to Justice Foundation is the leading funder of legal aid in Texas. We are committed to the vision that all Texans, regardless of income, will have access to the civil justice system. With TJAF funding, legal aid organizations provide assistance in civil matters to over 100,000 low-income Texans each year.**

On behalf of the Supreme Court of Texas, the Foundation administers the following funds:

### **Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA)**

The IOLTA program, established in 1984 by the Supreme Court of Texas, allows attorneys to pool short-term or nominal deposits made on behalf of clients or third parties into one account. Interest generated by these accounts is dedicated to helping nonprofit organizations that provide free civil legal services. As of July 1, 1989, all Texas attorneys handling qualifying client funds must establish an IOLTA account, unless a low balance account exempts them.

Per Supreme Court of Texas rules, attorneys must hold IOLTA accounts in eligible banks -- those that pay interest rates comparable to other similar situated accounts.

- **Basic Civil Legal Services (BCLS)**

The Texas Legislature enacted the BCLS program in 1997, when federal funding for legal services decreased significantly. People who file lawsuits must pay a small additional fee to the court, ranging from \$2 in the lower courts to \$25 for suits taken to the Supreme Court of Texas. These fees are designated to assist nonprofit organizations in providing free civil legal services to low-income Texans.

Included in this program are the mandatory Access to Justice fee (assessed to qualifying Texas attorneys), "And Justice for All" license plate proceeds, pro hac vice funds (fee assessed to out-of-state attorneys practicing in Texas), and other public funding.

- **Crime Victims Civil Legal Services (CVCLS)**

In 2001, the Texas Office of the Attorney General and the Supreme Court of Texas entered into an agreement to administer a \$5 million Crime Victims Civil Legal Services fund over the biennium. The monies granted must be used to provide free civil legal services to low-income victims of crime.

Eligibility Requirements

CVCLS-funded Organizations

- **Voluntary Access to Justice Contributions**

Each year, Texas attorneys have the option of donating \$100 or more when paying their State Bar of Texas dues. A significant portion of these donations is administered by the Texas Access to Justice Foundation and granted to legal aid organizations statewide.

These diverse funding sources make it possible for the Texas Access to Justice Foundation to grant millions of dollars each year for the provision of legal aid to low-income Texans.

### **3. Private Donations**

- A. Bar Association
- B. Local Civic Groups
- C. Businesses
- D. Foundations
- E. Service Organizations
- F. Community Leaders
- G. [www.grants.gov.com](http://www.grants.gov.com)



**Fort Bend Lawyers Care  
Strategic Partners  
July 24, 2010**

Asians against Domestic Abuse

Brazos Bend Guardianship Services

Catholic Charities

Child Advocates of Fort Bend County

Fort Bend County Meals on Wheels

Fort Bend County Regional Council on Substance Abuse

Fort Bend County Women's Center

Habitat for Humanity



**Fort Bend Lawyers Care  
Services and Programs  
July 24, 2010**

Advice and Counsel-On a weekly basis, our staff attorney answers legal questions by phone to qualified low-income citizens.

LegalLine-LegalLine is held the first Wednesday of every month from 7p.m.-9p.m.

Family Law Workshop-Monthly round table discussions for low-income citizens with family law issues are held in partnership with the Child Advocates of Fort Bend County.

Walk-In Clinics- Bi-monthly legal clinics held in local churches for pre-qualified low-income citizens to meet on a one-on-one basis with a volunteer attorney.

Adult Guardianship Seminars-Fort Bend Lawyers Care provides volunteer lawyers to answer legal questions at the bi-monthly seminars held in partnership with Brazos Bend Guardianship Services.

Attorney/Client Matching for case representation-ongoing program

Eviction Appeals Program-This is a new program for FBLC in partnership with Lone Star Legal Aid and the local judiciary.

Wills and End-of-Life document workshop-This workshop is held twice each year in partnership with Fort Bend Gardens and Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels.

Immigration Law-This is a new program for FBLC in partnership with Catholic Charities.

Veterans Benefits Day of Giving-A walk-in clinic held in November.

Pro Bono Self Help Litigants Program-This is a long-term project still in the feasibility stage.

## **2010 Strategic Plan** **Fort Bend Lawyers Care**

### **Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats & Opportunities**

This strategic plan addresses the following key strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities for Fort Bend Lawyers Care:

#### **Strengths**

- Knowledgeable base of volunteer lawyers
- Increased size of FBLC Advisory Board
- Focused and dedicated staff
- Strong relationship with the Fort Bend County Bar Association

#### **Weaknesses**

- Need to increase Advisory Board involvement
- Need to recruit more Volunteer Lawyers
- Need to decrease length of time needed to match pro bono lawyers
- Turnover in Executive Directors in 2009

#### **Opportunities**

- Increasing client base
- Growing population of clients with consumer and other legal issues

#### **Threats**

- Economic Slowdown affects funding
- Must avoid the appearance of competing with local bar for fee paying clients

### **Vision**

The Board of Directors' vision for FBLC is timely access to legal services for every resident in Fort Bend County, regardless of inability to pay.

## **Mission**

The mission of Fort Bend Lawyers Care is to provide low-income Fort Bend County residents with equal access to justice through volunteer lawyers.

## **Core Values**

The core values governing FBLC will include the following:

- Accessibility to Justice
- Integrity
- Best People
- Well Managed
- Respect for one another and our clients
- A lawyer has an obligation to the community; pro bono is part of our professional history
- Diversity
- Awareness of the problems
- Good stewardship
- Excellence

## **Major Goals (3-5 maximum)**

1. Refine services
  - A. Shift focus to low income residents only
  - B. Secure Court Certified Translators, Spanish speaking volunteer lawyers for Spanish speaking clients, and Spanish speaking non-lawyer volunteers
  - C. Increase number of volunteer lawyers
  - D. Increase number of pro bono cases
  - E. Set realistic expectations for each volunteer
  - F. Revamp Legal Line
  - G. Increase number of Walk-in Clinics
2. Increase Personnel
  - A. Staff Attorney (1 day per week)
  - B. Contract Grant Writer (maximum of \$5,000/year)
3. Increase and diversify funding sources
4. Increase FBLC Board of Director meetings to every other month
5. Establish the Fort Bend Lawyers Care Foundation

## **Committee Objectives**

During the last week of each month, the Executive Director will email the Committee chairs for updates on committee activities to be included in the monthly Board of Directors update.

**Personnel**-This committee is responsible for:

1. Hiring and termination of all employees.
2. Holding annual reviews in November of each year for all employees.
3. Making recommendations to the Board on pay raises and employee benefits.
4. Reviewing and recommending changes to Personnel handbook annually.
5. Approving paralegal interns from WCJC.

**Volunteer Recruitment (Attorney and Non-attorney)**-This committee is responsible for:

1. Assisting the staff in recruiting attorneys for Cases in need of pro bono lawyer representation, Legal Line, Walk-in Legal Clinics, Parent Order Legal Clinics, Women's Legal Forums, Speakers for community events (Brazos Bend Guardianship Services, Fort Bend Council on Substance Abuse, etc.)
2. Recruiting non-lawyers for "Justice for All" committee, Walk-in clinics, Speakers Bureau, Donor Drive, Pancakes and Pajamas, refreshments for Legal Line and Walk-in clinics.)
3. Organizing the April Volunteer appreciation dinner
4. Creating a speakers bureau

**Finance**-This committee is responsible for:

1. Preparing budget
2. Paying of the FBLC bills
3. Preparing Payroll
4. Overseeing fundraising
5. Monitoring grants
6. Negotiating building contract
7. Approving equipment purchase/rental

**Governance/Recruitment/Nominations** -This committee is responsible for:

1. Recruiting nominees for FBLC Board positions
2. Recruiting nominees for FBLC Advisory Board committee
3. Collecting Annual Commitment letters for FBLC Board of Directors and Advisory Board
4. Holding the Fall Advisory Board Meeting
5. Reviewing Board of Directors, Advisory Board, and "For the Public" notebooks annually

**Strategic Planning**-This committee is responsible for:

1. Reviewing the past year's Strategic Plan for accomplishments and areas of improvement
2. Creating the next year's Strategic Plan
3. Conducting the Internal Audit
4. Setting realistic expectations for volunteer attorneys
5. Monitoring publicity-Website, Quarterly newsletters, and monthly press releases
6. Researching and establishing the Fort Bend Lawyers Care Foundation

# Family Law Workshop

- Confused about your legal rights as a parent?
- Questions about divorce and your legal rights?
- Problems visiting your child?
- Problems with child support?

**\*If you are a Fort Bend County resident, please join Fort Bend Lawyers CARE at our free \*workshop for legal information in regards to Family Law including: Divorce, child support, child custody/visitation, and adoption.**

**When: Wednesday, August 4, 2010**  
**Where: Child Advocates of Fort Bend**  
**5403 Avenue N**  
**Rosenberg, TX 77471**  
**Time: 6:30-8:00pm**  
***Please bring any prior court orders with you.***



**Please call Fort Bend Lawyers CARE if you need more information  
281-239-0015**

**Hay intérprete al español disponible, si lo solicita. Necesita  
Reservario con anticipación. Lla  
281-239-0015**



*Providing a Voice and Healing  
the Hurt so that every child can  
have a safe, permanent home*



**Adult Guardianship Ad litem Certification CLE  
Sponsored by Fort Bend Lawyers Care**

**August 6, 2010, 11:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.  
George Memorial Library, Room 2B  
1001 Golfview Drive Richmond, Texas 77469**

**Refreshments will be provided.**

**Fort Bend Lawyers CARE** is proud to offer FREE to all volunteer lawyers, four (4) hours of Continuing Legal Education (including 1 hour of ethics) at The George Library, room 2B, August 6, 2010, from 11:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Check-in begins at 11:00 AM.

The Adult Guardianship Ad Litem Certification CLE is free to all licensed attorneys who agree to accept two (2) pro bono cases within the next 24 months. If you are not able to accept two (2) pro bono cases, please consider making a donation of \$150.00 to FBLC.

Topics include: Duties of an Ad Litem, Initiation and Administration of Adult Guardians, Doctor's Role in Medical Examinations, Local Governing Rules, Overview of Elder Law, and Limiting Guardianship Proceedings.

**For more information or to reserve your seat, please contact  
Holly Reyes or Philip Bartholomew,  
281-239-0015, [holly@fortbendlawyerscare.org](mailto:holly@fortbendlawyerscare.org)  
Or [intern@fortbendlawyerscare.org](mailto:intern@fortbendlawyerscare.org)**



## **WALK- IN LEGAL CLINIC**

**June 26, 2010, 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.**

**Calvary Episcopal Church**

**In the school gym**

**806 Thompson Road, Richmond, Texas 77469**

**Se Habla Español**

**Open to all low income residents of Fort Bend County with civil legal questions including: Divorce/Custody/child support, Adult Guardianship, Adoption, Real Estate, landlord/tenant, Credit Issues, and Wills & Probate.**

**To pre-qualify, please call 281-239-0015.**

**For more information please contact**

**Holly Reyes or Philip Bartholomew,**

**281-239-0015 or [holly@fortbendlawyerscare.org](mailto:holly@fortbendlawyerscare.org)  
[intern@fortbendlawyerscare.org](mailto:intern@fortbendlawyerscare.org)**

