



Federal Bar Association

The POWER Act: An Opportunity to Assist the Federal Courts

Overview

On September 4, 2018, President Trump signed “The Pro bono Work to Empower and Represent Act of 2018 or the POWER Act”, Pub. L. 115-237.

The legislation requires the chief judge for every judicial district to lead annual “empowerment events,” in partnership with State, local, tribal or territorial domestic violence service providers or coalitions to encourage lawyers in private practice to represent pro bono “survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.” Chief judges, whose districts include Indian tribes and tribal organizations, are also required to hold similar events biennially regarding Indian or Alaska Native victims.

Under the POWER Act, chief judges are required to “maximize the local impact of the event and the provision of access to high-quality pro bono legal services by survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.”

The law also requires the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts to submit to a Congress a report compiling and summarizing each public event conducted, as well as “an analysis of how each public event meets the goals of the legislation, as well as suggestions on how to improve future public events.”

FBA Assistance and Engagement

The POWER Act presents FBA chapters with the opportunity to assist the federal judiciary in meeting its obligations under the POWER Act in collaboration with local bar associations and pro bono legal service providers. While many domestic violence cases and related civil actions for restraining orders proceed in state court, issues of stalking and sexual and domestic violence may arise in federal court, including in bankruptcy, human trafficking and employment actions.

FBA chapters are encouraged to discuss the POWER Act with their respective chief judge and offer their assistance in the planning and promotion of programs as required under the POWER Act.

The FBA chapter for the Southern District of Texas recently assisted the local federal court in promoting a CLE program, entitled “*The POWER Act: Strengthening Communities by Empowering Survivors.*” The program, held on February 20, 2019 in Houston, Texas, in collaboration with the Houston Bar Association, focused on domestic and sexual violence and the attributes of a “trauma-informed lawyer.” It also encouraged lawyers in private practice to

represent *pro bono* survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. More than 90 lawyers attended the program and reception with members of the federal judiciary.

For more information about the SD-TX program, please contact Ms. Wafa Abdin, Executive Director of Houston Volunteer Lawyers at wafa.abdin@hvlp.org.