

President's Message

JAMES S. RICHARDSON SR.

For the Public Good

TWO OF THE hallmarks of the legal profession in the United States have been the twin attributes of public service and pro bono publico work. Historically lawyers have played a major role in the governing of the country and in charitable undertakings. During the latter part of the last century, the second prong sometimes went by the board in favor of the necessity to bill large numbers of hours for one's firm.

Fortunately, the trend seems to have been reversed. Law firms have recognized the need for all attorneys, and in particular newer members of the bar, to engage in service to those who cannot afford traditional legal services. Some firms have gone so far as to appoint "pro bono coordinators" to oversee these activities.

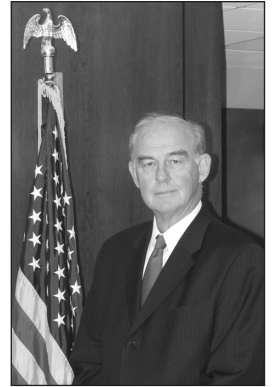
As many of you know model Rule 6.1 of the model rules of discipline provides that a lawyer should aspire to provide a minimum of 50 hours of such service per year. This goal is clearly desirable. Many states have taken similar steps and have included similar rules in their own rules of professional conduct. Other states, such as my home bar, Maryland, require the annual reporting of the actual hours spent in providing legal services to nontraditional clients who would otherwise be unable to pay for those services.

The rewards of such service are obvious. No matter what the nature of one's practice, pro bono work offers the opportunity to accomplish a great deal and, on occasion, to change the world. Had Abe Fortas not been available, *Gideon v. Wainwright*¹ might have had a different outcome. Had Bernard Cohen and Phillip Hirschkop not been offended by the anti-miscegenation laws and taken up the cause of Richard and Mildred Loving, the nation might have waited years for the prohibition of interracial marriage to be invalidated.²

But one need not be involved in a "big case" to make a contribution. In the District of Columbia, hundreds of lawyers give of their time, talents, and funds to ensure that children are represented in court proceedings and custody battles. Voluntary legal work is often the only source of counsel for many nongovernmental entities whose budgets limit their ability to retain counsel. Many local bar associations have established pro bono programs that are run either by the bar staff or by other counsel to provide representation to those of limited means. The U.S. Congress has es-

tablished a program for the training and representation of veterans pursuing claims based on their military service. All these opportunities are there for the taking.

A former attorney general of the United States once remarked that "to a poor man, the law always seems to be taking something from him." Although it may be idealistic or even trite to do so, as attorneys we must not allow this to be only picture of justice held by persons of limited or no financial ability to pay for legal services. I strongly urge each of you to seek out opportunities to put your law degree and talent to work in an area where you do not expect compensation. To do less is to deny our status as servants of the public good. **TFL**



A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James S. Richardson Sr." with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Endnotes

¹372 U.S. 335 (1963).

²*Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967).