



Monica Monday: Gentry Locke closed 53 cases for Blue Ridge clients in 2012.

Liv Kiser

"Most lawyers think it's important to provide legal services to those who can't afford it," says Monica Monday, managing partner of Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore. Pro bono work for deserving clients is encouraged by the Access to Legal Services Committee of the Virginia State Bar (www.vsb.org).

Most pro bono work falls into two categories: work for the indigent and services for charitable organizations.

In the Roanoke Valley, Blue Ridge Legal Services is the gateway for indigent clients seeking legal help. "We are a federally funded legal aid organization," says Susan Proctor, managing attorney. "You have to apply for our service. We are a poverty agency, so [income] has to be 125 percent of the federal poverty guidelines."

For The Public Good >

Executive Summary:

There are services and attorneys willing to help indigent clients and charitable organizations at no charge.

By Randy Walker

Getting billable hours is, of course, necessary to keep law firms going. But many firms take cases that don't generate bills. For several reasons, firms are willing to work *pro bono publico* (Latin: for the public good, usually shortened to pro bono).

Blue Ridge assists clients with civil matters such as family disputes, debt, bankruptcy, housing disputes, and eligibility for certain government benefits. It does not handle criminal matters, traffic violations, personal injuries or malpractice cases.

Proctor is the only staff attorney at Blue Ridge's Roanoke office. Qualifying applicants are usually referred to the Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley, or to private attorneys willing to take pro bono clients.

Legal Aid (lasrv.org) shares the same building—132 W. Campbell—as Blue Ridge Legal Services. "We used to be one [combined] office until the late 1990s," says David Beidler, general counsel of

Legal Aid. "That changed when Congress imposed restrictions on the kind of work we could do if we were receiving federal funds." As a privately funded non-profit, Legal Aid is able to take cases involving non-citizens and can also handle class action lawsuits.

Cases handled by Legal Aid include family law, custody, domestic violence, representing tenants in landlord-tenant disputes, and public benefits such as food stamps and Medicaid, says Beidler. Legal Aid only has four attorneys, however, so Blue Ridge refers many qualified applicants to private firms.

"In 2012 we closed 53 cases for Blue Ridge," says Monday. "That was over 300 hours of attorney time. They are largely domestic cases. Occasionally you'll have some custody matters, but mostly divorce. We also help Blue Ridge with power of attorney, advanced medical directives and where they need someone



Randolph Walker

Susan Proctor of Blue Ridge Legal Services: The door to 132 W. Campbell is the portal to pro bono services for many indigent clients in the Roanoke Valley.

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