



PRESS RELEASE

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ATTORNEYS COMMITTED TO RENDERING PRO BONO LEGAL SERVICES AND ANNOUNCE NATIONAL FIRST FREE INTERVIEW SCHEME

The Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) aligns itself with the views expressed recently by the Chief Executive Officer of Legal Aid South Africa, Ms Vidhu Vedalankar, that access to legal advice, legal representation and access to justice are the foundation of the rule of law and are imperative to the sustainability of our democracy.

'Attorneys have committed to providing 24 hours each per year of pro bono services to indigent members of the public and have been doing so for some time. In 2013 the law societies referred some 2 000 matters to attorneys on a pro bono basis. This is over and above matters that are accepted direct by law firms. Besides Legal Aid SA, the four statutory provincial law societies also have memoranda of understanding with a number of other organisations to refer pro bono matters to attorneys via the law societies, 'say LSSA Co-Chairpersons Kathleen Matolo-Dlepu and David Bekker.

They add: 'Over and above the formal pro bono referrals via the law societies, many law firms have active pro bono departments which take on small matters but also larger public interest litigation cases. Some firms have opened pro bono offices among poorer communities in order to be more accessible to those communities.'

The Chairperson of the Pro Bono Committee of the LSSA, Cape Town attorney Ricardo Wyngaard explains: 'Pro bono services are provided by attorneys to members of the public who qualify in terms of a means test for free services - much like the means test applied by Legal Aid SA. Between January and September 2013 the law societies received almost 4 000 pro bono applications. Some 2 000 of these qualified in terms of the means test and were referred to attorneys.'

The attorneys' profession is in principle able to provide some 515 000 hours of free work per year. In monetary terms, at an average fee of R675 per hour, this translates to approximately R347.6 million worth of free legal services to the public per year.

THE FIRST FREE INTERVIEW SCHEME

'The LSSA is aware that, in some cases, people do not qualify for pro bono, but would like to consult attorneys to find out whether their cases have legal merit and what it would cost to pursue the matter. In order to provide this option to members of the public, the First Interview Scheme by attorneys is being rolled out nationally,' say Ms Matolo-Dlepu and Mr Bekker.

In terms of the First Free Interview Scheme, members of the public are referred by the relevant provincial law society to attorneys on a roster basis for a first, free half-hour consultation. During that consultation, the attorney will discuss the merits of the matter with the client and also give an indication of the costs of taking the matter further. Some attorneys are prepared to undertake certain types of civil matters on contingency - or no-win-no-fee - basis, in terms of the Contingency Fees Act.

Where to access pro bono and First Interview Scheme legal assistance from attorneys:

Persons wishing to enquire about whether they qualify for pro bono services or to be referred to an attorney on the First Free Interview basis, should contact the relevant provincial law society:

Gauteng, North-West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo:

Law Society of the Northern Provinces -- www.northernlaw.co.za

Tel: (012) 338 5800 or e-mail: probono@lsnp.org.za

Free State:

Law Society of the Free State -- www.fs-law.co.za

Tel: (051) 447 3237 or e-mail: prokorde@fs-law.co.za

KwaZulu-Natal:

KwaZulu-Natal Law Society -- www.lawsoc.co.za

Tel: (033) 345 1304 or e-mail: probono@lawsoc.co.za

Western, Eastern and Northern Cape:

Cape Law Society -- www.capelawsoc.law.za

Tel: (021) 443 6700 or e-mail: cls@capelawsoc.law.za

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