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Pro Bono

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that gap, to make “justice for all” a reality under the rule of law—no exceptions, no excuses—because without that, we fail as a free and just society. We fail to realize the promises given to us by the best justice system in the world.

In what part of this system you might ask lays a promise of access to civil justice? Why is a “justice gap” such an affront to the rule of law? Seems like a tall order. Kind of utopian maybe. Well, yes, but there's this little radical document, a blueprint if you will, for the very framework—the undergirding of a just society.

It was concocted by some wild and crazy guys from the 18th century who were tired of societal problems like arbitrary abuse of power and the privilege borne of class systems. They hated gaps: representation gaps, wealth and income gaps, power gaps, and assuredly justice gaps. They weren't perfect I know—but this little blue print as amended is pretty darn close. Not everyone seems to have read it but surely you recognize it. And you know something? The very profession you have chosen is grounded in these promises—mandates really—found right in the preamble. Look no further, and I quote:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Everything a lawyer does in the interest of justice goes right back to that. I believe that to use your time, your talents, your formidable education, associations you will make and your privilege of practicing the law in the service of bridging the justice gap is nothing short of patriotic. It is nothing short of your duty. To bridge the justice gap is to defend the Constitution, to uphold the rule of law, and to fulfill

the dream of the framers—to ensure life, liberty, happiness, and equal justice for all. We all used to pledge this every day in school if I recall. These values are imbedded in our national DNA.

There is no equal justice without meaningful access to justice. When one person is denied justice, we are all in turn denied. And that means that no one should ever be barred from the courthouse door because they are too poor, too undereducated, too unpopular, have disabilities, don't speak English, or are not from here originally. No case is too small, no client unworthy of zealous representation. We must and we will **Bridge the Justice Gap** one client at a time if that's what it takes.

There's much work to be done—don't be afraid! You are well equipped to meet the Justice Gap challenge head on. After all, the very legal system we call our own is an “adversarial” system in which conflicts lead to resolutions, disputes lead to solutions, discord leads to accord. That is what we do. We do it very well—and it's great. We're always ready for anything and everything. So bring it on!

Oh, one more thing: You will have fun. You will enjoy getting out of the office, learning something new, going to court, holding a clinic, working outside your usual practice. Or perhaps you will use existing practice skills in a new or novel way. You will meet interesting, diverse people—like your clients! You will meet colleagues who will be friendly and supportive of your work—like law school deans, judges and all the Judicial Branch employees, other attorneys, and of course the legal aid community. The CBA will throw you a party—maybe with dancing and good food even. (If they don't we will.) And when you go home—at some point—at night, you will enjoy the feeling of having made a difference, and the satisfaction of knowing what an important role you have played in one life and in an entire justice system.

So young people: Go forth, be well, do good work. Have a great career and help us **Build that Bridge!** Help us close the **justice gap!**

Thank you. **CL**