

# THE DAILY RECORD

## Making the pitch for pro bono help

By: Mike Murphy June 22, 2014 0



Katie McConnell, who is an AmeriCorps VISTA member with the Feerick Center for Social Justice at Fordham University, visited Rochester last week to pitch the volunteer opportunities available through the Attorney Emeritus Program. Mike Murphy

Providing pro bono legal services is a good way for attorneys who believe they will be bored at the prospect of full-on retirement and want to continue practicing but who also are looking to ease out of practicing full time.

To help match the attorney with the right fit of pro bono opportunity is one of the reasons why the Hiscock & Barclay LLP firm signed onto the Attorney Emeritus Program.

"It's a great way to transition in the later years of practice and help others," said Tony Piazza, a partner who heads up the law firm's insurance coverage and regulation work. "Here's the answer."

Katie McConnell, an Idaho native, was in town last week to find others to join in on the benefits of the program. She is an AmeriCorps VISTA member assigned to the Feerick Center for

Social Justice at Fordham University.

McConnell works primarily on the state-operated program, which was started in 2010 as part of a push by New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman to get more attorneys involved in pro bono work.

About 2 million people in New York go through the court system without legal representation and don't have proper access to the court system, said McConnell, who is a 2013 Wesleyan University undergraduate.

"I don't think it's a fair outcome when people aren't represented in court," McConnell said. "Furthermore, it ends up having a greater financial burden on the court system and correctional services."

To qualify for the emeritus program, attorneys must be 55 years or older, have practiced for at least 10 years and be in good standing with the bar. They also must have passed the bar in New York.

Although the program has been around for four years and is more active in the New York City area, only in the last few years has the funding and staff been available to further develop it, McConnell said.

The tricky part is matching attorneys with specific areas they feel they would be most useful with opportunities where help is most needed.

"Making sure they are matched well with an organization takes a lot of conversations," McConnell said.

The Volunteer Legal Service Project is thrilled to be part of the placement opportunities for the program, said VLSP Executive Director Sheila Gaddis, who also is a partner at Hiscock & Barclay.

Opportunities may include court cases and help at legal clinics and with clients, Gaddis said.

"VLSP is able to give attorneys the flexibility they need and the types of cases they need that helps them make it work with their schedule," Gaddis said. "We are able to match our pro bono opportunity with their schedule."

While not an attorney, McConnell, too, has enjoyed the experience of working on the program. She has talked to a number of attorneys in different stages of their career, from newcomers to those who worked in Mississippi in the 1960s on voting rights issues.

All have plenty to offer to those who need their expertise most, she said.

"Coming into this program I naively had no idea that so many people went through the court system without the assistance of an attorney," McConnell said.

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ATTORNEY EMERITUS PROGRAM

KATIE MCCONNELL

PRO BONO

RETIREMENT

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