Senior and Inactive Lawyers

- In the District of Columbia, the Senior Attorneys Initiative for Legal Services (SAILS) Project helps law firms institutionalize a structure to encourage and support senior lawyers in undertaking more pro bono work as their careers wind down. For example, one firm with a formal pre-retirement three-year phase-down program adopted a policy that SAILS pro bono work would count toward billable hour targets for attorneys in that status. Another firm with a very flexible retirement policy adopted a policy adding pro bono work as a form of contribution (equivalent to training associates and serving on firm committees) that would warrant keeping an attorney at the firm in a senior counsel status. Importantly, SAILS encourages firms to establish a structure appropriate to their specific setting and culture and works closely with the legal services community to develop pro bono projects appropriate for senior lawyers.

- In Columbus, Ohio, the Volunteer Resource Center (VRC) was created in response to a 40% decline in funding and a 40% loss of lawyer staff at the Legal Aid Society of Columbus (LASC). VRC is a “central operations center” staffed by twelve retired lawyers who conduct phone interviews of potential clients once they have satisfied the LASC intake requirements, for the purpose of identifying cases where lawyers’ skills and experience can be put to use. Those cases are then assigned to a roster of over ninety active volunteers. The VRC program is supported by the attorneys and staff of LASC, which is an LSC-funded program. So, while the VRC project has no paid staff, it is able to build in the knowledge, skill, experience, and technical expertise of the in-house legal aid staff.

- Texas Lawyers Care, a pro bono program, paired supervising attorneys experienced in guardianship law, elder law, estate planning and probate law with emeritus attorneys to handle indigent guardianship cases. This helps bring in emeritus lawyers who might not otherwise feel comfortable practicing outside of their comfort zone.

- Established in 2008, the D.C. Volunteer Lawyers Project (DCVLP) provides at-home lawyers who want to do pro bono work with malpractice insurance, administrative resources, educational resources, and professional support and mentoring. Utilizing very minimal physical space, this initiative creates an online law firm for lawyers who would otherwise face great difficulty continuing in doing pro bono work. The DCVLP has been very successful since its creation, expanding to in-house and firm lawyers and engaging more than six hundred volunteer lawyers in family law cases.