



pro bono | réseau national
students | d'étudiant(e)s
canada | pro bono



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I'm the current President of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. I'm very familiar with PBSC's work across Canada, both as chair of the Federation's Standing Committee on Access to Legal Services, and as a member of Chief Justice McLachlin's Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters.

I have another recent connection to PBSC. My son is in first year law school in Winnipeg and has been actively involved in a public legal help clinic – the Legal Help Centre in Winnipeg. I like to think I may have passed on to him an interest in improving access to justice, but even more grateful to PBSC for the work it does to expose law students to the value of pro bono service, which I personally believe is a responsibility of every member of our profession.

From my experience as a sessional lecturer at the law school in Manitoba, I'm reminded of how critical it is for students to be engaged in access to justice at an early stage of their careers. Students need to understand that the justice system exists to service the public, many of whom have impeded, or no access to proper representation. PBSC plays a critical role in ensuring that students understand the reality of the world they're about to enter.

There are, however, more students interested in pro bono work than there are opportunities. The challenge for the profession and legal academy is to figure out mechanisms that will permit students to have greater opportunities while they're in law school to do pro bono work. We need to work with the law schools, PBSC, and the other clinical programs to give students more opportunities to make a difference.

Most Canadians don't think of access as a social justice issue, and even fewer people think of it as something that's relevant to them. But it's not just an abstract concept. It is in fact a very serious problem that affects all of us. We have a justice system that's paid for by the public that the public cannot effectively use.

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(As told to Karen Gross)

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