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Group wants Idaho attorneys to volunteer more time

- The Associated Press

A group of Idaho judges and attorneys is promoting more volunteerism among its ranks to help people who can't afford to pay for legal advice.

The Idaho Pro Bono Commission hopes to encourage attorneys employed in the public sector and in large private and corporate law firms to adopt volunteering policies.

Sixth District Magistrate Rick Carnaroli, a member of the group, said that volunteering is good public relations, and that it also allows Idaho lawyers to live up to their oath to "contribute time and resources to public service."

"A lot of people can't afford to come to court to resolve their issues," Carnaroli told the Idaho State Journal.

The Idaho Pro Bono Commission formed in 2008 as a joint effort by the state and federal court, and the Idaho Bar Association.

Carnaroli said that many attorneys don't volunteer because they're concerned they're not familiar enough with particular areas of the law and might not serve their clients well, or end up committing malpractice.

To help attorneys volunteer, the Idaho Pro Bono Commission is offering free continuing legal education seminars, including a divorce and custody basics seminar at three locations in the state in October.

Having more attorneys volunteering could also help take some pressure of the court systems in Idaho. Litigants representing themselves can jam up the system with unnecessary or spurious legal motions or proceedings.

U.S. District Chief Judge B. Lynn Winmill estimated that 80 percent of federal court litigants don't have a lawyer.

Carnaroli said that volunteering can lead to a sense of fulfillment.

"A lot of us have had very satisfying experiences doing pro bono work," Carnaroli said.

The University of Idaho, since 2006, has required all law students to complete 40 hours of pro bono work to graduate to instill a culture of volunteering.

Pocatello attorney Monte Gray received the Idaho Bar's service award in 2009 for his pro bono work.

"It's great for everybody to give back to the community," he said. "If you give more than you take out of society, it makes your existence worthwhile."