

## MIDYEAR MEETING

### **Jobs Corps task force promises to do more in coming year**

By Victor Li

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When James Silkenat became president of the American Bar Association in August, he identified as one of his top priorities, [the creation of a job corps for new lawyers](#). He announced the formation of the [Legal Access Job Corps](#) to tackle the lack of adequate legal representation for disadvantaged communities and the glut of unemployed and underemployed lawyers.

On Sunday, during the annual ABA Midyear Meeting, Silkenat and others received a progress report from several state and local organizations that have tried to solve this lawyers gap. The Job Corps task force received testimony from representatives from Chicago, South Dakota, New York, Wisconsin and Maine, who spoke about their programs and proposals, while asking the ABA to continue promoting this issue. The task force vowed to do a better job publicizing the matter, and promised to spend the second half of 2014 examining ways the ABA can play a greater role in financing and supporting these and other programs. The task force also unveiled [a video](#) that it hopes will better drive home the depths of the problems facing underrepresented individuals and underemployed lawyers.

“We don’t do a good enough job educating the public,” said Chief Judge Eric Washington of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, who serves as co-chair of the task force alongside Allan Tanenbaum, managing partner at Equicorp Partners, and Patricia White, dean of the University of Miami School of Law. “Hopefully this video will elevate this important issue.”

The organizations trying to alleviate the problems caused by lack of access to justice and inability to serve have approached the problem in different ways.

The Chicago Bar Foundation’s Justice Entrepreneurs Project focuses on low and moderate income people who make too much money to qualify for free legal aid, but don’t make enough to afford lawyers who charge traditional firm rates. The program, which started in June 2013, also serves as an incubator for recent law school graduates who wish to form their own socially conscious law firms. Attorneys in the project will receive a \$1,000 monthly stipend and will provide free services to low and moderate income clients. Additionally, lawyers will be expected to generate business by finding paying clients. The project, which will grow to 30 lawyers by next spring, is committed to fixed-fee arrangements, as well as using technology to better serve clients. “The ABA can help us work with law schools, many of which are starting their own legal incubators,” said Terri Mascherin, a Jenner & Block partner who chairs the project’s steering committee. “Our goal was to set up a model that could be easily replicable. The ABA can help us do that by continuing to occupy the bully pulpit.”

South Dakota State Bar's Project Rural Practice tries to solve a geographic and social problem within the state by using underemployed young attorneys to represent clients in rural areas. According to PRP, 65 percent of the state's bar association members practice in the four major cities in South Dakota, making rural residents a severely underrepresented minority. The PRP is trying to alleviate this problem by pairing young lawyers with established attorneys in rural areas in the hopes that the young attorneys might eventually succeed their older mentors.

Similarly, the Maine State Bar Association also has a matching service pairing up young attorneys with established rural lawyers looking to retire soon. "We are the oldest state in the U.S. in terms of population, as well as with regards to the age of our lawyers," said William Robitzek, president of Maine's bar association.

Meanwhile, the State Bar of Wisconsin did not have a specific program to combat the lawyer and legal help gap. However, as Sherry Coley, chair of the state's Challenges Facing New Lawyers Task Force, explained, the state was considering several major changes that would impact young lawyers, including free or reduced dues for membership in Wisconsin's mandatory bar association, free CLEs and programs including one to help lawyers find work in rural areas, another to establish a "legal residency" that would give lawyers on-the-job training, and an externship for law students to work as court clerks. Additionally, task force member United States Bankruptcy Court Judge Elizabeth Snow Stong of the Eastern District of New York did not have a specific program in mind when she advocated expanding opportunities for young attorneys to work as judicial clerks, even if unpaid. "Hopefully, they'll be compensated, but if not, I've still seen plenty of people who have been willing to work as clerks for free or for reduced wages," Stong said. "It's a great opportunity for them."

Tom Bolt, vice chair of the ABA Law Practice Division, wondered why the ABA wasn't putting its considerable resources behind these and other projects throughout the country. Co-chair Tanenbaum explained that the task force was still gathering facts and learning more about the various projects and initiatives. "First we have to find out what's going on, and I think we've done a remarkable job over these last four or five months," Tanenbaum said. "During the second half of this year, part of our role will be to have some direct discussions with these projects and match them with ABA resources."

*Updated March 25 to correctly state Judge Eric Washington's title.*