



ROBERT M. BELL  
CHIEF JUDGE

COURT OF APPEALS OF MARYLAND  
634 COURTHOUSE EAST  
111 N. CALVERT STREET  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21202  
(410) 333-6396  
(410) 347-3908 (FAX)  
robert.bell@courts.state.md.us

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Dear Maryland Lawyer:

There is, as you know, currently an economic crisis in this country. As a result, many Maryland residents are facing job losses, declining incomes, foreclosures and evictions. Other collateral effects and disputes, including increased tensions among family members or neighbors, and even domestic violence, can be anticipated. Maryland is also experiencing an economic crisis. One casualty of both crises is funding for Maryland Legal Services. Just as the legal needs of Marylanders are increasing, funding to meet those needs is declining. Indeed, the decline has been precipitous, reviving memories of funding levels and of a funding crisis not experienced for decades.

A primary source of legal services funding in our State is the Interest On Lawyer Trust Account (IOLTA) program. Those funds are administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC), which uses them to make grants to 35 legal services organizations serving Maryland residents. In Fiscal Year (July 1 – June 30) 2008, MLSC received \$6.7 million in IOLTA income. Due to the economic crisis, interest rates this year have been unprecedentedly low. Consequently, IOLTA income has fallen far short of income projections for Fiscal Year 2009, and actual collections amount to \$ 3.4 million, approximately 49% less. Looking ahead, unless interest rates improve in the short term, it is estimated that IOLTA revenue in the coming year, FY2010, will be \$2 million, a decrease of an additional 41%. Thus, over two fiscal years, the total loss in IOLTA revenue may exceed 70%.

Effective July 1st, the beginning of FY2010, MLSC grants to most of its grantees will be reduced by approximately 20%. Unless there is a turn-around in the upcoming fiscal year, more drastic cuts can be anticipated in FY11, and those cuts likely will require the Legal Aid Bureau of Maryland, MLSC's largest grantee, to close some offices. Failure of the funding environment to improve also makes it likely that MLSC will have to cease funding some programs around the State.

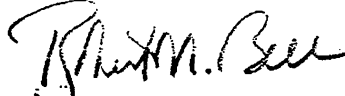
As a member of the legal profession, a member of the Bar of this State and an Officer of the Court, you are keenly and uniquely aware of how important it is that the Judiciary and the justice system, civil as well as criminal, that it administers, be fully accessible to all of the citizens it serves and that it not only delivers full and fair justice, but is perceived to do so. In that regard, you appreciate and well understand the necessity and value of representation. As such, I am confident that you are well aware of the lawyers' ethical and professional pro bono publico responsibility, embodied in Rule 6.1 of the Maryland Rules of Professional Conduct. Indeed, your awareness is confirmed yearly by the Report of the Standing Committee on Pro Bono that analyzes your mandatory reporting of the pro bono services contributed. That the American lawyer has been a critical force in the development of our Country, in particular in ensuring allegiance and commitment to its founding principles, also is well known to you, as well as appreciated.

Notwithstanding any successes achieved in individual practices, commendable as they may be, the commitment to professional excellence and the preservation of the rule of law is undermined when there is a lack of access, perceived or real, to the justice system. Given the current funding crisis, lack of access is more than theoretical. It is for this reason that I bring this situation to your attention, confident that, as in the past, consistent with Maryland Rule 6.1, you will respond appropriately.

Rule 6.1, of course, prescribes alternative means for a lawyer to meet the aspirational goal it sets: rendering pro bono legal service or “contributing financial support to organizations that provide legal services to persons of limited means.” Contributions of time, as well as financial resources, can be reported on the Pro Bono Legal Services Report that attorneys are required to file each year. Whether you choose one means or both, your contribution will make a meaningful difference in the lives of Maryland residents and will help preserve our justice system.

Thank you for your consideration and for all you, as Maryland lawyers, do.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert M. Bell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Robert M. Bell