

**Remarks of Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers  
CBA Annual Meeting Bench/Bar Luncheon  
June 23, 2011**

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the CBA – its leaders, members and staff – for inviting me to address you today. It gives me great pleasure to be here, especially to join you and my colleagues in honoring Judge Robert Holzberg with the Henry J. Naruk Award. I can think of no one more deserving, and I congratulate you on your fine choice. I had the good fortune as a new civil judge to have Judge Holzberg as my presiding judge in Waterbury and I can tell you from first-hand experience that he is a highly-skilled mediator who is a master at brokering an agreement between litigants.

Today, I would like to focus most of my remarks on an issue of concern to both the bar and the courts – that is the explosion of self-represented litigants.

Let me start off by providing you with some statistics. In 2010, an astounding 84 percent of all family cases and 27 percent of all civil cases had at least one party who was self-represented. The numbers are close to 90 percent in housing matters.

The economy has obviously contributed to this trend and many people who may have been able to afford an attorney before, no longer can. In addition, Legal Aid organizations are only able to meet a small fraction of the legal needs of those who cannot afford to hire an attorney.

I have come to believe that this growing trend is the biggest challenge the judicial system will face over the next five years. We all know that people are far better off when they have legal representation. Moreover, this trend impacts the entire court system. Judges and staff must spend a lot more time going over basic procedures, which ultimately results in delays for everyone. More

importantly, it is far more difficult to administer justice when a party is not represented.

At this point, we have no choice but to acknowledge a trend that is not going to subside. In the interest of justice, we have to provide meaningful access to these self-represented parties. In other words, we have to provide them with some tools, so that they may effectively present their case.

I am extremely proud of the efforts that the Judicial Branch has made in this area, and I am equally appreciative of how the bar has stepped up to the plate to address this challenge.

I would like to briefly talk about some of these efforts, starting with initiatives to make it easier for individuals to find counsel. Last fall we organized a pro bono committee chaired by Superior Court Judge Bill Bright. This committee includes many attorneys, some of whom also serve on the CBA's Pro Bono Committee. My thinking was that if we combined the talents and abilities of our judiciary, the CBA and legal services to address this issue we could come up with creative solutions. That is exactly what is happening.

As we began speaking with attorneys about providing pro bono services, three concerns are raised again and again -- lack of information about how to volunteer, lack of malpractice insurance and lack of knowledge about a particular area of the law.

In response to these concerns, the state's legal services organizations have agreed to provide malpractice insurance as well as training to attorneys interested in this work. In addition, Judge Bright's Pro Bono Committee will be conducting a summit in October to bring together leaders of the bench, bar and in-house corporate communities to provide information about how and where to

volunteer. By the end of the day, we hope that many attorneys will be signed up to take on specific matters.

The Committee is also putting together a web-based catalog of pro bono opportunities that are available statewide, which will include, among other things, the anticipated time commitment, the area of practice and the scheduled court dates associated with each case. This web-based catalog will include a description of the malpractice insurance and training that is being offered by the Legal Aid organizations. The portal will be accessible from the CT Legal Services website located at: [www.CTLawhelp.com](http://www.CTLawhelp.com) and will serve as the clearinghouse for pro bono opportunities. Attorneys will be able to access the website at any time during the day and night and will be able to sign up via the portal to volunteer for particular matters.

The Judicial Branch is committed to working with all segments of the bar to make the provision of pro bono legal services easier and more rewarding. In return, we are looking to you all to remember and act upon the obligation that each of you have to devote some of your professional time and skills to help those who cannot otherwise afford an attorney.

Through this cooperative undertaking, we expect that we will see an even greater commitment of valuable time and resources by the talented attorneys of our state to those in need.

In addition to looking at ways we can assist with pro bono efforts, we also have implemented measures to help individuals when they decide to go it alone. We have and will continue to translate our court forms into plain language, develop self-help publications and videos, and expand our website.

Another measure that assists self-represented parties is the Volunteer Courthouse Information Officer Program, which has been adopted in four judicial

districts. This program has served thousands of people each year. The greeters, who are clerks that have been pulled from behind the counter during peak times, provide basic information as people enter the courthouse such as where they need to go. We plan to continue this program as well.

Finally, I would like to turn to an initiative that the Judicial Branch is undertaking that I believe will benefit you as attorneys. Our plan is to make available to you audio recordings of court proceedings via the website.

While this is not occurring tomorrow and we have a lot of work to do before this becomes a reality, my hope is that this service will be up and running in two years.

As background, I appointed the Committee on Court Reporting Monitors and Court Reporters in 2009 with former Justice Katz as its chairperson.

The committee's final recommendations are nothing short of revolutionary for the Connecticut court system. The Judicial Branch has now adopted digital audio recording as a standard for recording court proceedings. This will maximize public access to our courtrooms and reduce costs.

We envision that members of the bar and the public will ultimately be able to access court recordings almost instantaneously through our website at minimal cost. Additionally, audio captured digitally can be easily replicated onto other media such as compact discs and disseminated via computer by e-mail or posting.

The benefits of this to both you and your clients are obvious. The cost of obtaining a record of the proceeding will be very low and it will be available very shortly after the proceeding occurs.

Currently about half of our courtrooms and hearing rooms have been outfitted with “For The Record” digital recording equipment. This is significant because in order to implement the recommendation, all of our hearing rooms and courtrooms must be equipped with this technology.

As you can imagine, we still don’t yet know if we will have the necessary funding to complete this project, which may delay its implementation. But, I can assure you that we are committed to moving forward on this initiative as quickly as possible.

In closing, I want to thank you for inviting me to address you today and for all of the work that you do on behalf of your clients and the court system.