

# Maryland Lawyer

News and analysis of legal matters in Maryland

## Pro bono

# Young lawyer an old hand at pro bono work

BY DANNY JACOBS

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Alicia N. Ritchie graduated from law school three years ago but is already a veteran when it comes to pro bono work. She currently helps domestic violence victims secure protective orders, those with convictions seek expungement and a group of Somerset County residents start a charter school.

And Ritchie's just getting started.

"I'm always on the lookout for something new," said Ritchie, an associate with **Miles & Stockbridge P.C.** in Baltimore. "Anything that seems interesting to me, I do."

Ritchie receives referrals for protective orders from the Sinai Hospital Family Violence Program, the **Women's Law Center of Maryland Inc.** and CHANA: Counseling, Helpline & Aid Network for Abused Women. She still remembers her first pro bono case, helping a young woman pregnant with her boyfriend's third child. In addition to securing a protective order, Ritchie set up a visitation schedule. All of the issues were ironed out in court, and Ritchie got the boyfriend to consent to all of the terms.

"It was a good outcome for everyone," she said, adding her client "was really just grateful."

Ritchie receives referrals for expungement matters from the Homeless Persons Representation Project Inc. She first reviews each person's file and explains what can and cannot be expunged from his or her record. She enjoys handling the cases because of how an expungement can change someone's path in life.

"A lot of them are searching for jobs but may have, because of their circumstances, gotten in trouble in the past," she said. "Their criminal records are holding them back."



Alicia N. Ritchie said the reward of doing pro bono work as a young lawyer outweighs the risk. 'You don't often get many opportunities as a young lawyer to take something and run with it,' she said.

While Ritchie sought the protective order and expungement work, the Somerset County case came to her. A colleague asked to her to help research the administrative law matter. Somerset Advocates for Education had submitted a charter school application that was denied by the local board of education in 2007, a decision upheld by the state board of education the same year.

The organization appealed the decisions in **Somerset County Circuit Court**, where a judge ruled in December that the state board's ruling should be reversed and remanded the case to the local board to be vacated. The case is now pending in the Court of Special Appeals, Ritchie said.

### Confidence builder

Handling pro bono work as a young lawyer can seem daunting, Ritchie said, but the opportunity to take ownership of a case is a reward that outweighs any risk.

"You're a little scared because it's all you, but at the same time, it's all you," she said. "You don't often get many opportunities as a young lawyer to take something and run with it."

The confidence Ritchie has gained through her pro bono work has allowed her to be more vocal and active in her regular cases where she otherwise might have been more timid.

"It really does get you over the hump," she said.

Ritchie also finds her pro bono work beneficial because it keeps her legal skills sharp outside of her main practice focus on litigation. Then there is the satisfaction she gets from helping those in need.

"We are in a unique position to help people. We have the law behind us," she said. "I am willing to do whatever I can in terms of pro bono work."

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