

Remarks
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I feel privileged to share in this celebration of ten pioneering years of the Coffin Fellows. As I said on the Law Day 1998 launching, to know that competent and dedicated young lawyers are working for troubled families in their most agonizing times and setting high standards of practice in this field in Fellowships associated with my name is the most meaningful tribute I can imagine. Here, almost ten years later, I can speak with even greater pride and gratitude.

My role today is really just a footnote to this venture, or, if you will, a grace note, a token of appreciation to the founding firms and present sponsors for not only their initial vision, but their perseverance and follow-through. My grace note takes the form of a little book entitled "The Law Firm and the Public Good." It was jointly published by the Brookings Institution and the Governance Institute, of which I was a co-founder in 1986. Brookings is a well known research organization. The Governance Institute is a very small one; its goal is to improve the functioning of government and the relationships among institutions affecting public policy. While our profession is not government, we have a special responsibility to take action to increase access to justice where people have fallen through the cracks of the government safety net.

This book, in which I have written a sum-up chapter, is the product of a number of discussion meetings among lawyers from large law firms in D.C., Denver, New York, St. Louis, and Richmond about our pro bono obligation and various ways chosen to meet it. These are the ways in which mega law firms have taken up the fight. Some have subsidized public interest groups. Some have loaned their lawyers to such groups and clinics. Some have set up full service pro bono departments headed by a senior partner. Just this year, the National Law Journal has reported on others. The legal behemoth, Bingham McCutchen, has committed itself for fifteen years to adopting a class of young Harlem students and seeing them through to college. One has taken on the representation of detainees labeled "enemy combatants." Another specializes in death row representation. And one involves itself in legal, financial, and consulting aid in rebuilding New Orleans.

The book, inscribed to your firm with my grateful recognition of your work is on the table. Please take it and share it with colleagues. Now why did I think this was an appropriate gift to you? You are not, even Pierce Atwood, a mega firm. But you have shown how smaller firms may make a unique contribution to enlarging access to courts and to remaking an entire field of widely needed, increasingly complex, and often neglected practice - family law. I understand that Charlie Miller told some of this story to the directors of the Legal Services Corporation when they were recently meeting here. This is right on target. We in Maine are not very good at blowing our own horn. But here is a story that merits a book of its own.

The story, however, couldn't be told without the commitment of the Fellows themselves of two precious years of their lives to carrying on this work and shouldering the burdens, legal and emotional, that go with it. So -- our deepest appreciation go today to Fellows Lucia Comeau and Courtney Beer. Happy birthday and many, many happy returns.