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New Training Video Helps Attorneys Serve Indigent Defendants

The New Jersey Judiciary today released a training video for attorneys who represent indigent defendants in domestic violence contempt cases. The video is the first in a series of training videos designed to help attorneys assigned by the courts to represent indigent defendants.

The attorneys provide this service "pro bono," which is a shortened Latin phrase that means "for the public good."

In his introduction to the video, Chief Justice Stuart Rabner says, "Pro bono work is vital to our court system. One of the most cherished protections our citizens have is the constitutional right to be represented by counsel."

In New Jersey, defendants who cannot afford an attorney are entitled to free legal representation in certain types of cases. While public defenders are available in certain case types, private attorneys share the burden of providing counsel when the law does not provide for the public defender to do so.

The attorneys are assigned on a rotating basis. They receive no compensation. With few exceptions, all New Jersey attorneys are required to accept pro bono assignments.

Attorneys doing pro bono work might not have experience in practicing the type of law that applies in their assigned case. The video series will help them prepare to represent their clients.

The first video provides guidance on how and when to set up an initial meeting with a client; what to expect at the initial court hearing; the documents and information that the attorney should expect to receive from the prosecutor during discovery; how to handle a guilty plea; and how to proceed if the defendant requests a trial.

The video also directs attorneys to a manual prepared by the Judiciary for their use in those cases.

Additional videos will help pro bono attorneys represent clients in municipal appeals and in parole revocation hearings.

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