



## Study Reveals Georgia Low Income Earners Face Legal Woes

By Christine Cristiano

*According to a study released by The Georgia Bar Association, sixty percent of Georgia’s residents with low to moderate incomes will require advice related to civil legal problems, such as foreclosures or divorce proceedings, at least once annually. However the majority will not seek proper legal counsel and will try to resolve the issue on their own. The study also revealed that consumer problems including housing, health, family law, employment and ‘abusive’ contract terms were the most common legal problems.*



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According to the study, 90 percent of 1500 respondents did not obtain legal help for their legal issues, 75 percent tried to solve the problem themselves, 16 percent did not seek legal advice nor tried to solve the problem on their own. Only 9 percent of the respondents sought some form of advice or help from an attorney. The study also revealed that low to moderate income residents, defined as making less than \$30,000 and no more than \$60,000 annually, have more than six million legal needs per year.

According to lawyers who offer pro bono legal services for charity, the study, the first in 15 years, will help raise awareness and additional funding regarding legal aid efforts, public education and mediation issues.

Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Leah Ward Sears, acknowledged that “the concept of equal justice for all is the driving force behind this initiative. We are all stakeholders in

closing the justice gap. If the system does not work equally for all, then it does not work for any of us.”

According to Atlanta attorney Charlie Lester, who works pro bono with Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan, “there’s no way to ensure each case is assigned its own attorney - and there’s no telling if that will ever happen.” Lester acknowledges that members of the legal profession “must join forces to seek solutions.”

Sears concludes that, “in Georgia, it’s not just a lack of funding. It’s a lack of will.”

The issue of civil legal needs of Georgia’s low and moderate income residents and the study’s findings will be discussed at a summit meeting on June 24th. The meeting is sponsored by the Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Civil Justice, and will be held at the State Bar of Georgia headquarters in downtown Atlanta.

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