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## STATE BAR AND PRIVATE PHILANTHROPY JOIN FORCES TO HELP FAMILIES SAVE THEIR HOMES

(SEATTLE) – <u>The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation</u> has joined the <u>Washington State Bar Association</u> in the fight against home foreclosure. A grant of \$100,000 to the <u>Washington State Bar Foundation</u> will support a two-year expansion of the Bar Association's Home Foreclosure Legal Aid Project.

"The foreclosure crisis is far from over," said William Vesneski of the Allen Foundation.

"Families are still struggling and many face significant barriers to retaining their home, which is their primary asset. We felt it was important to stand beside the State Bar, its partners, and the hundreds of volunteer attorneys working to protect homeowners' economic security."

Experts say the housing crisis continues with nearly 2,000 new foreclosure filings in Washington in December.

The Bar Association launched the Home Foreclosure Legal Aid Project in 2009 as housing counselors and civil legal aid offices around the state were inundated with more cases than they could handle.

"Looking at the data, it was clear the crisis had strained every available resource and left low- to moderate-income homeowners without the expertise and advocacy they desperately needed when they faced losing their homes," said Bar Association President Steve Crossland, of Cashmere. "Commitment to service is a hallmark of Washington's legal profession, so with some focused training and support, we were able to deploy hundreds of additional volunteer attorneys. The response has been incredible."

That response was also compelling to the Allen Foundation. "There are many lawyers doing great work to support communities," said Vesneski. "But seeing the Bar Association put up its resources and reputation to help vulnerable homeowners – we thought that was impressive."

The Bar Association partnered with statewide housing counselors and Northwest Justice Project, the state's largest legal aid law firm, on the Project. It began a two-year expansion last year with a nearly \$1.1 million *cy pres* award from the Washington State Office of the Attorney General from settlement funds involving one bank's lending practices. The Project is helping enforce the state's 2011- enacted Foreclosure Fairness Act, which provides homeowners the right to mediation in foreclosure proceedings. The addition of private dollars allows the Bar Association to provide more support for volunteers.

"There's high leverage here," said President Crossland. "For every one staff attorney we put on the ground, there are more than 100 volunteer attorneys available to work with homeowners."

That means there is a high return for every philanthropic dollar invested, too. At the end of the two-year expansion, the Bar Association's Home Foreclosure Legal Aid Project will have saved an additional \$80,000,000 in Fair Market Value (FMV) of property from foreclosure and preserved at least \$8,150,000 more in homeowner equity for low to moderate income homeowners.

The Washington State Bar Association's mission is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice. The Washington State Bar Foundation's mission is to help the Bar Association advance diversity in the profession, and increase the public's access to, and understanding of, the justice system.