



## Public Lawyers and Public Service

The law is the engine that keeps the government machine running. That machine would break down quickly if not for the hard work of our many dedicated public lawyers.

Public lawyers make up approximately 10 percent of the State Bar of Arizona membership. They are prosecutors, public defenders, assistant attorneys general, city attorneys, Judge Advocate General officers and counsel for numerous public offices, boards, commissions and agencies.

They often work long hours at salaries below their counterparts in the private sector, and more recently they have shared the sacrifices of their fellow citizens in these lean economic times through salary freezes and furloughs. Yet these attorneys devote their lives and practices to offering their services for the greater good of the citizens. I can tell you from firsthand experience, they serve us well.

Included among the ranks of public lawyers are public interest lawyers. Although these lawyers do not necessarily receive a government paycheck, they work to advance the public interest through the law. Their causes range from liberal to conservative, but they are all professionals who have devoted their practices to serving the public good.

Military lawyers deserve special recognition. They make even less than their colleagues in other public practice and expose themselves on occasion to dangerous conditions. More important, they are part of the larger national defense effort that keeps us all safe.

I often encourage law students to consider beginning their career in public law. The experience to be gained as a young lawyer in public practice can serve as a solid foundation for a very successful and satisfying career in the law and lead to even greater opportunities. Many of our judges spent some portion of their prior practice in the public sector.

Given the nature of public practice, new public lawyers are often asked to perform tasks usually reserved for more experienced attorneys in private practice. In addition, public law offices almost always offer young lawyers great training and mentoring opportunities. As a young Assistant Attorney General, I was fortunate to have worked with many experienced and talented lawyers who took the time to mentor and teach me how to practice law.

Public law is also a great place for private practitioners who are tired of billing time and who seek a change of pace. I worked with many lawyers at the Attorney General's Office

who had previously worked in the private sector. Their reasons for leaving private practice varied, but they all seemed to be very satisfied. These attorneys served as some of the best mentors to the younger lawyers in the office.

The State Bar of Arizona Public Lawyers Section offers the opportunity to study the issues, duties and responsibilities of public lawyers. The Section provides its members the ability to participate in activities directed toward improving the administration of justice and promoting issues of importance to public lawyers. Joining the Public Lawyers Section may help advance your practice and will provide you the opportunity to interact with other public lawyers, judges and members of the State Bar.

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After 16 years as a public lawyer, I left public practice for the private sector earlier

this year. The transition was easy given that most of my clients are governmental entities. Although the move made sense for me at this juncture of my career, I will always cherish the time I spent as a public lawyer.

The Public Lawyers Section recently bestowed upon me the 2011 Distinguished Public Lawyer Award. I was deeply honored by this gesture, and I am proud that the award hangs on my new office wall in private practice as a reminder of my many great years in public practice.

Thank you to all of the great public lawyers in Arizona for serving the citizens of our State. I am proud to have served with you for so many years. 

