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## **REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION TO THE MINNESOTA STATE BAR ASSOCIATION**

### **MSBA CIVIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

A. That the MSBA create an annual Citizen Lawyer Award to a MSBA member who best exemplifies the Association's commitment to support and promote public understanding of civics, the legal system and the rule of law in Minnesota.

The process for granting the award shall involve the following:

- 1) Collection of the attached nomination form
- 2) Recommendation of recipient to the MSBA Council by the MSBA Civic Education Committee's Policy Subcommittee
- 3) Consideration of nominee by the MSBA Council

B. That \$600 be appropriated each fiscal year beginning with 2009-10 for a historic plaque located in the MSBA office commemorating recipients of the Citizen Lawyer Award; and to cover the cost of giving a plaque to the recipient recognizing their contribution to civic education in the state.

#### **REPORT**

In 2006 the American Bar Association recognized the "immediate and significant threat" to civic education in America's public schools as a result of narrowing curricula focused on math, reading and science. This sentiment was recently echoed by retired Justice Souter during his address at the ABA's annual meeting. Citing the fact that two-thirds of Americans are unable to name the three branches of Government, the Justice called on American lawyers "to see to it that civic understanding becomes a birth right of every American."

The Citizen Lawyer Award is intended to recognize an MSBA member who responds to this call. By highlighting a lawyer who has made significant contributions to the civic competency of Minnesotans, we hope others will be encouraged be involved in the effort.

Though now changed to "Citizen Lawyer", the Civic Education Committee's 2009-10 budget narrative states that "[i]n order to encourage lawyers to become involved in its work, the Committee is working to define the term 'civic lawyer' for the bar and to persuade lawyers to be civic lawyers by involving themselves in its programs." The Committee's efforts began with a series of Citizen Lawyer CLE's at local law schools where alumni panelists dedicated to civic engagement and public service shared their experiences as active civic leaders and why they have such a strong commitment to service beyond representing clients. Participants were invited to consider how they balance civic engagement with their practice, and what they think

the civic role of lawyers should be. The Citizen Lawyer CLE was convened at the University of Minnesota Law School on April 18<sup>th</sup>, at William Mitchell on August 14<sup>th</sup>, and is scheduled for Hamline University - School of Law October 8<sup>th</sup>. In the wake of the success of the University of Minnesota CLE, the Civic Education Committee charged their Policy Subcommittee with the task of developing the Citizen Lawyer Award. Though the Citizen Lawyer events recognized lawyers for their contribution to public service in general; the Subcommittee concluded that this award be given to an individual for their contribution to civic education, though not necessarily youth. This focus on civic education was intended to ensure the consistency of the award with the mission of the Committee and to distinguish the award from other MSBA awards.

This year the Policy Subcommittee is making an effort to call attention to Minnesota Rule of Professional conduct 6.1(b)(3) encouraging attorneys to “provide any...services through: participation in activities for improving the law, the legal system, or the legal profession...” of which educating the public about the civic and legal systems is certainly included. Recognizing an attorney whose work falls within this aspect of the rule is one part of the Policy Subcommittee’s effort in this area.

The Civic Education Committee requests \$600 per fiscal year to pay for the award costs. The Committee was not provided any funds to pay for direct expenses in the 2009-10 bar year. While the Committee has been actively fundraising to cover direct expenses, it is unlikely to raise sufficient money for all the programming and services planned for 2009-10. The award was not included in the original budget for the Civic Education Committee. The idea for the award was developed and approved by the Committee after the 2009-10 budget was approved by the Assembly last April.

