As I near the end of the second year of my term as a volunteer in Minnesota's lawyer discipline system, I appreciate what a great privilege it has been to work alongside so many great volunteers over the years. It should come as no surprise that lawyers volunteer in the discipline system—we are, after all, members of a profession that says "yes" more than we say "no" to opportunities to serve. We need not look very far to see lawyers volunteering their legal services to indigent clients and accepting leadership and other roles in our local and state bar associations, our neighborhoods and our faith communities. As members of a profession keenly sensitive to the value and the limits of time, we are gracious in giving our time.

Blessed are those who serve without recognition, title, or compensation merely for the benefit that flows to our fellow human beings and our profession.

A Service Profession
And serve they do. Our Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board (LPRB) members take time from their jobs and lives to review appeals of summary dismissals and admonition decisions, hear reinstatement cases and make probable cause determinations, and provide oversight of the discipline system in Board meetings and as members of the Board’s Rules and Opinion committees, Executive Committee, and other committees. Our District Ethic Committee (DEC) volunteers around the state devote their time to review and investigate complaints against lawyers and meet, discuss, and recommend appropriate discipline. Our disciplinary system could not function without the excellent work of these volunteers.

**I believe that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty.**
—John D. Rockefeller

Some lawyers serve out of a sense of obligation. As members of the legal profession, we have a "special responsibility for the quality of justice" and are called upon to "help the bar regulate itself in the public interest." ¹ We have an obligation not only to observe the Rules of Professional Conduct ourselves, but to ensure that fellow members of the bar observe them.² To do otherwise compromises our responsibility to the public as well as our independence as a profession that ensures government under law.³

Some lawyers serve for the unparalleled opportunity to learn about the rules that govern our profession, how our disciplinary system works, and how to be better lawyers themselves. Others serve because of their interest in playing an active role in the profession, staying connected with their colleagues, or expanding their network. Whether they view such service as an opportunity or an obligation, lawyers play a crucial role in the discipline system to hold lawyers who violate the rules accountable.

Public Participation
But it isn’t just lawyers. Nine of the 23 LPRB members and 30 percent of the 302 DEC members are not lawyers.¹ They come from a variety of walks of life and backgrounds. Some work in law enforcement, or the finance or insurance industry; some are bankers, paralegals, or school teachers. They have no obligation to our profession and receive no benefit from being educated about the rules governing lawyers. They serve as members of the public, to be the voice of the public, make sure the public interest is served, and contribute their unique perspective to the process.

The Volunteer Track
Most volunteers begin their service as a DEC member.³ They volunteer because they are asked and are happy to become involved with their local bar association doing this important work. The DECs conduct preliminary investigations of the majority of ethics complaints brought against lawyers each year, operating under timelines established by the Minnesota Supreme Court.⁶ The 21 DECs⁷ around the state vary in size, depending on the volume of complaints and the characteristics of the district. Each has its own personality and processes. Our largest DEC is the 4th DEC, which has 110 investigators, and the smallest is the 14th DEC, which has four investigators. Each DEC is chaired by a local attorney appointed by the related district bar association, and each takes its own approach in considering an investigator’s report and recommending discipline. Some DECs meet in person, some electronically, and one has a hearings process. The LPRB is committed to ensure that each DEC has the support it needs to attract and train lay and lawyer volunteers and the Board is currently determining how best it can support the DECs in recruiting and training volunteers and processing complaints.

However, as members of this self-regulating profession, we all share the obligation to maintain a strong volunteer component to the discipline system. We need to take this opportunity and get involved. Contact your local DEC chair.⁸ Volunteer as an investigator. And encourage a nonlawyer in your local community to do the same.
Notes
1 Minnesota Rules of Professional Conduct, Preamble [1][6].
2 Id. at [12].
3 Id.
4 By rule, nine LPRB members and 20 percent of DEC members must be nonlawyers. Minnesota Rules on Lawyers Professional Responsibility, Rule 3(a), 4(a).
5 While prior DEC service is not a requirement for appointment to the LPRB, few Board members are appointed who have not served on their local DEC.
7 The 21 DECs are organized around Minnesota’s 21 bar districts. A map of the bar districts and contact information for the DEC chairs is located on the MSBA’s website at: http://www2.mnbar.org/governance/districtbars/index.htm
8 Visit http://www2.mnbar.org/governance/districtbars/index.htm for DEC contact information.

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<th>District Ethics Committee Chairs</th>
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| **1st District** – Daniel J Beeson  
LeVander Gillen & Miller PA  
South St. Paul |
| **2nd District** – Kathryn S Hahne  
Faegre & Benson LLP  
Minneapolis |
| **3rd District** – Jill I Frieders  
O’Brien & Wolf LLP  
Rochester |
| **4th District** – Susan Rhode  
Moss & Barnett  
Minneapolis |
| **5th District** – Richard E Tollefson  
Smith Tollefson & Rahrick  
 Owatonna |
| **6th District** – Steven R Sunded  
Sunde, Olson, Kircher & Zender  
St. James |
| **7th District** – Steven R Peloquin  
Peloquin & Minge PA  
Perham |
| **8th District** – Patrick H Gogins  
Attorney at Law  
New Prague |
| **9th District** – Jared Peterson  
Berenz Rodenberg & O’Connor  
New Ulm |
| **10th District** – Kelly M Wagner  
Baedler Baedler Marks & Blahnik  
Austin |
| **11th District** – Jessica Durbin  
Johnson Killian & Seiler PA  
Duluth |
| **12th District** – Richard G Stulz  
Swenson Nelson & Stulz PLLC  
Madison |
| **13th District** – Damien D Sandy  
O’Neill O’Neill & Bardoson  
Pipesboro |
| **14th District** – Daniel L Rust  
Johannson Rust Stock & Rasmussen  
Crookston |
| **15th District** – James Perunovich  
Law Office of James Perunovich  
Hibbing |
| **16th District** – Jan Nordmeyer  
Nelson, Kuhn and Nordmeyer  
Glenwood |
| **17th District** – Hans K Carlson  
Costello Carlson & Burzyn  
Jackson |
| **18th District** – Kim E Brandell  
Brandell Law Office & Mediation Center  
Elk River |
| **19th District** – Michael A Welch  
Hebert and Welch PA  
Forest Lake |
| **Range District** – Bruce R Williams  
Public Defenders Office–  
6th District  
Eveland |
| **21st District** – Robert A Howard  
Hicken Scott Howard & Anderson  
Anoka |

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