

## The Anonymous Justice Fund Donor

More than 100 Justice Funds have been established through contributions to the North Carolina Bar Foundation Endowment. Lawyers from across the state and from all walks of life have been honored with dedication ceremonies over the course of five decades, but until now no one has been recognized for creating a Justice Fund anonymously.

This donor has done so because they want other members of the North Carolina Bar Association to consider establishing Justice Funds of their own. Especially members of a certain age who, not unlike this donor, hail from small and steady practices which may not necessarily fit the profile of the typical Justice Fund contributor or honoree.

“Like many lawyers who have contributed faithfully toward their retirement – contributing the maximum amount each year that could be deducted for tax purposes – I had some idea what that would mean, although I had never given much thought to exactly how much money that would be,” the anonymous donor said. “And then my financial advisor called me and told me how much I would have to take out to reach the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) after I turned 72, and it was quite a bit annually.”

While continuing to support their church and community, the donor turned to the Foundation because the North Carolina Bar Association has contributed so much to their successful, fulfilling legal career.

“I have been a member of the bar association every single year of my career in North Carolina. For a long time, I have been part of the Lawyer Referral Service and participated in sections, committees, and other bar activities. My firm and other firms our size over the years have obtained liability insurance through Lawyers Mutual, which is an offshoot of the bar association. And I attended CLE programs after that became mandatory. I always participate in 4ALL as have other lawyers in my firm.”

The anonymous donor is also a huge proponent of BarCARES, the confidential, short-term intervention program provided cost-free to members of participating judicial district bars, voluntary bar associations and law schools. BarCARES is made possible by BarCARES of North Carolina, Inc., the North Carolina Bar Association, the North Carolina Bar Foundation, Lawyers Insurance Agency, as well as participating judicial district bars, voluntary bar associations, law schools and the NCBA Paralegal Division.

“It is a wonderful thing,” the donor elaborated. “As my mother used to say, I was born on a sunny day, so I have never had to deal with mental health issues. But I know many lawyers who do but were too prideful to admit it. We have this confidential program, and as lawyers we deal disproportionately with mental health issues, so this is an important program. We don’t know how many lawyers have been helped because the program is confidential, but I do know that many lawyers have taken advantage of this.”

The donor also knows many lawyers who could establish a Justice Fund just as they have done.

“So many of the people recognized with Justice Funds have been large firm lawyers in whose names the contributions have been received from loyal lawyers within the firm, or they are highly successful litigators, or some variation thereof. I wondered how many people who look like me have a Justice Fund. So many members of the North Carolina Bar Association are members of firms with five lawyers or less, which means we have a lot of small firm members without law partners to contribute large amounts of money.

“As I continued to think about it, I wondered, if it is done anonymously, these factors that make my profile so much like the majority of our members might encourage other members in smaller firms to consider establishing their own Justice Funds. So many of our members are in smaller firms, and a lot of them are close to hitting that 72-year marker that requires them to take out a certain amount of dollars. Now you have this sum of money that you have to spend or give away, it makes sense to think about that provision, and that says ‘Wow!’ to me.

“I have been encouraged to use my name, and someday I may, but right now I want to do this and hopefully catch the eye of people who look like me, because I am just like them.

“I am them.”