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Firms, Corporations Join Plan With Goal of 120,000 Volunteer Hours

City Bar Starts Major 'Pro Bono' Project

By Daniel Wise

The Association of the Bar of the City of New York launched a major new *pro bono* program yesterday.

Nearly fifty law firms and corporate law departments said they would attempt to contribute to the program thirty volunteer hours for each attorney with the firm or law department. The program will be known as Volunteers of Legal Services or VOLS, Association President Louis A. Craco announced.

Broad Support

Among the judges and other dignitaries voicing their support for the program at a press conference yesterday at the Association's headquarters were Chief Judge Constance Baker Motley, of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York; Chief Judge Jack B. Weinstein, of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York; Presiding Justice Francis T. Murphy, of the Appellate Division, First Department; Presiding Justice Milton Mollen and Justice Richard A. Brown, both of the Appellate Division, Second Department; Justice Betty Weinberg Ellerin, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the City of New York; Cyrus R. Vance, of Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, and New York

City Corporation Counsel Frederick A.O. Schwarz Jr.

Chief Judge Lawrence H. Cooke commended the Association's *pro bono* initiative in a statement read by Justice Ellerin. "In lending their prestige, resources and expertise to this noble undertaking," the Chief Justice observed in his statement, "the members of The Association of the Bar of the City of New York will, undoubtedly, not only secure legal services for the needy but will add another jewel to the Association's crown."

Mr. Craco, whose term as the City Bar president will end later this month, called the *pro bono* project the "major" goal of his two-year tenure. "The legal profession has to work very hard to be seen as a helping profession rather than an exploitative one," he said. "That is particularly true in an environment in which the economic strains on the profession are great."

\$10.8 Million Contribution

Mr. Craco said that the firms participating in the program had all agreed to use their best efforts to meet the goal of thirty hours per attorney of donated time. According to data compiled by the Association, so far, 120,000 hours of attorney time

have been donated if all the participants are able to achieve the standard set by the program.

Based on what observers believe to be a conservative estimate of the average billing rate, \$90 per hour, 120,000 hours of attorney time would translate into a \$10.8 million donation of volunteer legal services.

All but three of the law firms that have signed up for the program have more than ninety lawyers, said Sheldon Oliensis, the chairman of the Association's Committee on Access to Legal Services, which created and organized the program. To reach the program's goal of enlisting 4,000 lawyers, Mr. Oliensis said, greater efforts will now be made to reach out to smaller and medium-sized firms and law departments throughout the City.

The program will be operated by a three-person staff on a projected annual budget of \$200,000. Mr. Oliensis said. To date, he said, \$100,000 of that amount had been raised, \$50,000 from the Association's own funds and \$50,000 from the Federally funded Community Action for Legal Services (CALS) program. Under recently promulgated rules, programs such as CALS receiving Federal

City Bar 'Pro Bono' Project

Continued

funds to provide legal services to the poor are required to allocate 12.5 percent of their Federal grants for *pro bono* efforts by the private bar, Mr. Oliensis said.

Assistance Needed

A former law-reform director at a legal services program in Brooklyn, Joel Lieberman, has been selected as the program's executive director. Mr. Lieberman, together with a second attorney and a legal assistant, will act as liaisons between legal services and community organizations and law firms and corporate law departments participating in the program in order "to direct services where they are most needed," Mr. Oliensis said.

"Legal services organizations haven't met a fraction of the needs of the poor and with cutbacks in Federal funding the situation is even worse," Mr. Oliensis said. To maximize the effectiveness of the volunteer effort, cases will not be accepted one at a time, he said.

Instead, he said, the program's staff will work with legal services organizations to devise strategies to funnel volunteer attorneys to the areas of greatest need. As examples, Mr. Oliensis suggested, a firm might be tapped to help a legal services office clear up a backlog of certain types of cases, such as Social Security

appeals, or to handle categories of cases that were previously turned away because of staff shortages.

To date twenty-nine law firms and nineteen corporate law departments have agreed to participate in the program, Mr. Craco said. Mr. Vance headed the effort to enlist law firms, and Richard S. Lombard, vice president and general counsel of Exxon, took the lead in recruiting corporate law departments.

Volunteers Listed

The following law firms have volunteered to participate in the program:

Cahill Gordon & Reindal; Carter, Ledyard & Milburn; Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton; Cravath, Swaine & Moore; Davis Polk & Wardwell; Debevoise & Plimpton; Dewey, Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer & Wood; Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson; Hughes Hubbard & Reed; Kaye, Scholer, Fierman, Hayes & Handler; Rosenman Colin Freund Lewis & Cohen; Shearman & Sterling; Sullivan & Cromwell; Kramer, Levin, Nessen, Kamin & Frankel.

Also, Lord, Day & Lord; Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy; Mudge Rose Guthrie & Ferndon; Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison; Phillips, Nizer, Benjamin, Krim & Ballon; Proskauer Rose Coetz & Mendelsohn; Rogers & Wells; Shea & Gould; Simp-

son Thacher & Bartlett; Squadron, Ellenoff, Pleasant & Lehrer; Webster & Sheffield; White & Case; Willkie Farr & Gallagher; Winthrop, Stimson, Putnam & Roberts, and Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom.

The law departments of the following corporations have volunteered to participate in the program:

American Telephone and Telegraph Company, Arthur Young & Company, Chemical Bank, Citicorp/Citibank, Consolidated Edison Co., Exxon Corporation, Freeport-McMoran Inc., W.R. Grace & Co., International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation, Manufacturers Hanover Corporation, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, Mobil Corporation, The Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York, New York Life Insurance Company, New York Telephone Company, The New York Times, J.C. Penney Company, Pfizer Inc. and Teachers' Insurance and Annuity Association of America.

In a release issued yesterday the Association of the Bar stated that it "fully supports the important work performed by other established *pro bono* programs." Noting that many firms already participate in pre-existing programs, the statement said that volunteer work performed under the auspices of existing programs would be credited towards the thirty-hours per lawyer goal created by the VOLS program.