



Global Pandemic Sparks Pro Bono Surge

Introduction



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How has 2020 affected you? Covid-19 has changed the way we do almost everything. Whether you're an attorney or a law student, you can't help but feel moved by the number of people reaching out for help. Law firms across the country have thus lined up together to help those who have been most heavily affected by the coronavirus. Today you're going to read how four law firms, a student, and a software company are providing legal assistance to those most vulnerable.

New York attorney reaches out to those affected

Since 2015, Atikiva Cohen has been working for a law firm specializing in commercial litigation. He works in midtown Manhattan, one of the hardest-hit places in the world. Cohen has made gallant efforts to ease the suffering of those affected. He made a post on Twitter that went viral after offering as much free legal help as he could. He was immediately inundated with requests for legal assistance.

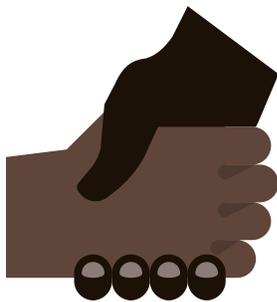
Not unaffected by the virus, his wife tested positive for the virus. She has recovered and as a nurse on the front lines, is constantly in harm's way. Although not tested himself, Cohen feels healthier after battling mild symptoms. Having recovered and experienced the fear firsthand, he felt it was his duty to help others. Cohen has also offered aid from fellow attorneys willing to provide their services pro bono if requests for legal assistance were made outside his area of expertise.



Law student Alyssa Leader inspires students to get involved

UNC Law student Alyssa Leader created a Twitter campaign, "[Law Student COVID-19 Pro Bono Support Project](#)" which inspired more than 2,500 law students to sign up to provide free support for attorneys working on COVID-19-related cases. Her timeline has since been filled with tweets by immigration and indigent defense attorneys overwhelmed by clients in need sparked by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Leader sends out available projects with a signup link where people can sign up for projects that interest them. Projects generally get filled within five minutes of posting as enthusiasm for helping is high. Leader adds that people are feeling helpless with no sense of control. Her [Twitter campaign](#) is a way to support attorneys doing good work and the clients that desperately need it.



Ropes & Gray, Dechert, and Paul Hasting work together

Roz Garbose Nasdor, director and pro bono counsel for Ropes & Gray, said the firm has challenged its attorneys to complete 40 hours of pro bono work annually from 20 before the outbreak. Nearly 250 attorneys at the firm have volunteered to be part of a virtual pro bono global workforce. "People everywhere are in need, so we're not going to stop doing what we're already doing," Nasdor said. "But we're asking people to (offer) more if they have the capacity."



"There's a lot of need, and in...this particular pandemic, we're seeing a lot of people from firm(s)...stepping up," said Suzanne Turner, pro bono counsel at Dechert. Pro bono counsel at law firms like Dechert are seeing a steady rise in the need for legal help, whether related to healthcare, economic, regulatory, accessibility, or other issues. "People are scared, they're isolated, and...want to figure out (how to regain) control of their lives. She adds that now is the perfect storm of both need and interest...a "pro bono boom..."

The influx of pro bono cases highlights how necessary legal aid is for vulnerable and low-income Americans generally unable to afford it. Brian Moran, senior counsel and co-chair of Paul Hasting's global pro bono program, said firms are happily working together. "It's not competitive, it's cooperative," he said. "We're all trying to help."

Leading technology provider makes access easier

It's not only attorneys and students who are eager to help. [AbacusNext®](#) is a leading technology provider for legal, accounting, and compliance-focused professionals. They have partnered with several firms to provide free software and legal services to front-line medical staff and first responders. Together, they are rolling out initiatives to help health care workers prepare legal documents entirely online.



Virtual interviews supported by AbacusNext® HotDocs Advance document automation software will now enable services like wills, living wills, estate plans, and health care POAs to be completed without the need to meet attorneys in person. This initiative is an expansion of the Wills for Heroes program, which provides free legal services to firefighters, police, and other first responders.

Why should you volunteer?



In these times of fear and uncertainty, we have to accept that we are all in this together. Reaching out to those who need it is one way of re-establishing contact with the outside world, even if it is from the comfort of your home office. Have you got the time or the means or more simply a place in your heart to help those who have been affected?



Dedicating your time, energy, and resources to people and causes creates positive change on both local and global scales. Think of it as an investment in yourself just as it is in the causes you support. Your reputation and your self-worth will improve while potential clients will know that you care. Simply put, volunteering feels good. Trust me, you'll sleep better at night knowing that you've made the lives of others better.

Notes

Audience: Lawyers, law firms

Word count: 871

Estimated Reading Time: 5min.

