

Corporate Counsel Organization Highlights

Letter From The President Of The Boston Bar Association



To The Readers Of The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel:

"Send Lawyers, Guns And Money"

When the bank foreclosed on their building, the Vietnamese-American tenants were fully paid up on their rent. During the foreclosure, however, conditions at their residence had deteriorated; the building had developed extensive leaks and the heating system had broken down. The tenants – including the elderly and disabled – nevertheless persevered. When the bank sought to evict them, they called the Greater Boston Legal Services for help. A staff attorney, Zoe Cronin, led their successful defense. After exploring all avenues of redress, Cronin negotiated an agreement with the bank entitling the tenants to a one-year lease at reduced rent, an option to purchase the building, and compensation exceeding \$40,000 for the conditions they had endured.

These tenants were fortunate. They had a lawyer. In normal times, legal services programs in Massachusetts turn away over one-half of qualified callers in need of help as a result of inadequate resources.

But these are not normal times. Funding for legal aid in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is in crisis. In recent years, revenue generated by attorneys' Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts ("IOLTA") has comprised over one-half of the financial support for legal services in the state. Established by the Supreme Judicial Court in the late 1980s, the IOLTA program requires lawyers holding clients' funds for a short time or in nominal amounts to deposit them in special interest-bearing accounts. Most of the interest earned on those accounts is distributed to legal aid programs that serve the poor and the elderly throughout the Commonwealth. As a result of the dramatic drop in interest rates and the decline in the number of real estate and other transactions, revenue generated by IOLTA for legal aid is projected to plunge by 54 percent this fiscal year alone.

The drop in IOLTA revenue has already translated into an unprecedented decline in the availability of legal services. The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation ("MLAC"), the largest funding source for civil legal aid in the Commonwealth, was forced to slash its general support grants to legal services by nearly 40 percent, from \$22 million last fiscal year to \$13.5 million this year. MLAC drained its reserves of its last \$3.5 million to do so, leaving no cushion for next year. Greater Boston Legal Services has already cut its budget by 13.5 percent, Neighborhood Legal Services by 29 percent, and Western Massachusetts Legal Services by 27 percent. It is estimated that 20,000 fewer people in desperate need will be served as a result.

These cuts come at a time when the need for legal aid has never been greater. People are struggling to survive and put food on their tables and shelter over their families' heads. At moments like these, the requests for legal assistance in areas such as unemployment benefits, evictions, bankruptcy and even domestic violence multiply. Neighborhood Legal Services, which serves the poor and the elderly in Essex County, has experienced a 30 percent jump in calls in recent months. There are too many in need and too few resources to help.

What can – what should – we as lawyers do?

Write to the governor, your state legislators and legislative leaders to urge them to preserve state funding of \$11 million for civil legal services for both the current fiscal year and fiscal year 2010. While maintaining funding at the current level will not bridge the gap caused by the loss of IOLTA revenue, at least it will not exacerbate what are already tragic consequences for the neediest residents of our state. Sample letters can be found on the website of the Equal Justice Coalition at www.equaljusticecoalition.org.

Donate to legal aid programs in your community and encourage your law firm or organization to maintain or increase its contributions to legal aid programs. In fiscal year 2008 alone, law firm and individual donations to MLAC-funded programs totaled \$4.1 million. A list of these programs may be found on MLAC's website at www.mlac.org.

Represent low-income individuals on a pro bono basis. In a recent communication, the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association notified pro bono leaders at various Boston law firms that "[o]ver the next few months, we ... will be coming to you with more requests for assistance and new projects to address the need," particularly in areas such as "housing, including foreclosures, evictions due to foreclosures, evictions and housing conditions cases; bankruptcy, both Chapter 7 and 13; unemployment compensation appeals; and domestic matters, including domestic violence." Say yes when you get the call, but also seek out opportunities to help. The BBA works with organizations such as the Volunteer Lawyers Project to identify volunteer opportunities and train attorneys to handle the work. Check out their websites at www.bostonbar.org/ps and www.vlpnet.org.

We must try to make a difference. In the words of Warren Zevon's song, "The s_t has hit the fan."

Sincerely,
Kathy B. Weinman

¹ Send Lawyers, Guns, and Money is the name of a song written by Warren Zevon (c. 1978 Zevon Music/BMI)



Sponsors Help NJCCA Share Holiday Cheer

New Jersey Corporate Counsel Association (NJCCA) President (far right) Valerie Camara of Merck thanks the sponsors' representatives (front row from left) Karen Chin of Verizon Wireless and Rebecca Brazzano of Thompson Hine and (back row from second left) Jean Weiner of Haley Stuart, Ana Maria Garcia of sanofi-aventis and Larry Samilow of Update Legal for their support of the holiday outreach event held at the Balocco restaurant in Clifton on December 15. Debra Forman of Pinstripe Coaching (back row, first left) was the evening speaker. At the event, more than 35 corporate counsel wrapped more than 200 books as holiday gifts for children in domestic violence shelters in New Jersey.

WESFACCA To Discuss Advanced Outsourcing

Scheduled to take place from 8:30 a.m. to noon, Advanced Outsourcing and Transformation IT Contracting, sponsored by WESFACCA, will be held at the Woodway Country Club in Darien, CT on Wednesday, February 4.

The speakers will be Akiba Stern and Edward Hansen, partners at Morgan Lewis and David Perla, co-founder and co-CEO, Panagea3.

This interactive session will challenge many of the traditional tenets of

contracting for outsourcing and complex technology relationships. Participants will learn how the "process of inclusion" can help to uncover value opportunities by recognizing the important relational aspects of the project, and how the best "partners" can be found.

For more information about available CLE credits and fees, see CLE Events at *The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel* website at www.metrocorpccounsel.com.

To register visit www.acc.com.

ACC To Present Mini MBA For In-house Counsel

From Monday, February 9 through Wednesday, February 11 at 1 to 4:45 p.m., the Northeast Chapter of ACC will host a Mini MBA for In-house Counsel at the Executive Leadership Center, Boston University School of Management, 595 Commonwealth Avenue, 4th Floor, Boston.

The instructors, members of the faculty of the Boston University School of Management, will be: Professor Susan Samuelson, Strategy & Policy; Associ-

ate Professor William Kahn, Organizational Behavior; Associate Professor Melvyn Menezes, Marketing; Professor William Samuelson, Finance and Economics; and Associate Professor Michael Smith, Accounting.

For more information about available CLE credits and fees, see CLE Events at *The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel* website at www.metrocorpccounsel.com.

To make a reservation call (617) 353-4238 or visit www.acc.com/minimba.

BBF Sponsors Annual John & Abigail Adams Ball

The Boston Bar Foundation (BBF), a staunch supporter of legal services to promote better public understanding of the law and to improve the administration of justice in Massachusetts, held its annual John & Abigail Adams Benefit Ball, the premier fundraising event of the Boston legal community, on January 24 at the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston. The event was chaired by Steven H. Wright, the executive partner at the Boston office of Holland & Knight.

Proceeds from the ball will be used to fund immediate grants to legal services organizations, giving critical assistance to low-income individuals and families

in Massachusetts, and will support initiatives that encourage and facilitate community service by lawyers.

The BBF, the charitable affiliate of the Boston Bar Association, honored Boston-based real estate developers James G. Keefe and Patrick A.T. Lee of Trinity Financial by presenting the 2009 Public Service Award. Messrs Keefe and Lee have been instrumental in revitalizing local neighborhoods and building a more livable city through creative concepts for affordable housing. They helped to highlight the BBF trustees' goal of raising funds for programs that address housing and homelessness issues.