



Makes it Easy for Corporate Counsel to do Pro Bono Work

—Rachel Spears

With the influx of thousands of evacuees from the hurricane-ravaged Gulf into the Atlanta area, many local nonprofit agencies are being stretched to their limits with an overwhelming demand for services. As an in-house lawyer, you may wonder what you can do to help. You might not feel like your legal expertise is conducive to providing direct legal services to individuals such as the evacuees, but consider providing your services to the nonprofit agencies whose mission is to serve those in need.

That is the idea behind the newly-established Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta, which matches volunteer lawyers from corporations and law firms with nonprofits in need of free legal services in the areas of corporate, employment, tax, real estate, employee benefits, regulatory compliance, contracts and leases, environmental and intellectual property. By providing pro bono assistance similar to the legal work they do every day, volunteer lawyers can provide a tremendous service to our nonprofit clients.

The mission of the Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta is to make it as easy and enjoyable for transactional lawyers at corporations and law firms to provide valuable pro bono services for nonprofit agencies serving the public interest in Metropolitan Atlanta. The Partnership accomplishes this by:

(i) screening nonprofit organizations to ensure that they meet our criteria and to identify their specific legal needs;

(ii) contacting volunteer lawyers to determine whether they would like to take on the matter (generally discrete and manageable non-litigation matters); and

(iii) arranging and attending a meeting between the nonprofit client and the volunteer attorney to discuss expectations and timelines (although most of the projects are not time-sensitive).

The volunteers then assume responsibility for the matter, but not without the necessary support. While the projects generally require expertise consistent with the legal skills of the volunteer attorney, to the extent assistance is needed, the Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta can provide legal forms and other resources and

consultation with attorneys who have expertise in the laws of nonprofit and tax-exempt organizations. The Partnership staff follows up with both the nonprofit client and the volunteer lawyer periodically and if the volunteer becomes too busy, the Partnership will be happy to reassign the matter at the volunteer's request. The Partnership can also pair an in-house attorney with another volunteer lawyer to assist in the representation. The Partnership also provides professional liability insurance coverage for all volunteers.

Examples of the type of matters available at the Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta include: (i) drafting an employment contract for a community development corporation; (ii) preparing the incorporation documents for a student enrichment program for low-income youth, (iii) assisting a new nonprofit in applying for trademark protection of its name and logo, (iv) advising an affordable housing organization on tax issues and (v) reviewing a lease for a job-training program.

The Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta was founded by lawyers from several corporations and law firms in Atlanta, including The Coca-Cola Company, GE Energy, Kilpatrick Stockton, King & Spalding and Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan (the current host of the Partnership's office), and is modeled after the Pro Bono Partnership (PBP-NY), a New York/New Jersey/Connecticut-based nonprofit that identifies and refers pro bono matters to transactional lawyers. Lawyers from GE have been heavily involved in PBP-NY since its formation eight years ago and were instrumental last year in establishing a similar organization here in Atlanta, where GE Energy is headquartered. The Board of the Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta is made up of **BellSouth Corporation Senior Litigation Counsel Kendall Butterworth, AGL Resources Senior Corporate Counsel/Legal Leah Cooper, GE Energy Senior Counsel Frank Landgraff, Coca-Cola Company Intellectual Property Litigation Counsel Michael J. Kline and GE Energy Vice President and General Counsel Happy Perkins.**

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serves community-based nonprofits whose primary purpose is to operate ongoing programs or activities that benefit low-income communities or that otherwise serve the public interest. Clients work in the areas of health and

human services, affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization. In order to be eligible, the nonprofit agency must be unable to pay for legal services without significant impairment of program resources.

When private companies are faced with important decisions, they consult their in-house or outside legal counsel. Nonprofits face some of the same complex issues as for-profit entities but often do not have the contacts or resources to retain lawyers with the right expertise. Faced with the prospect of diverting resources from their mission-driven programs, many nonprofits go without necessary legal services and, as a result, do not protect their best interests in transactions and possibly put themselves at risk for litigation.

The Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta serves nonprofits in need of legal assistance and provides in-house and transactional lawyers with the same level of rewarding pro bono opportunities already available to their litigator colleagues. The Partnership makes available to them pro bono work that is challenging, fulfilling and in their area of expertise. The Partnership also provides volunteer lawyers with the resources they need to provide the highest-quality legal services. By accessing the often untapped resource of transactional lawyers, the number of lawyers involved in public service can increase. Pro bono work can expand beyond the courtrooms and into our communities.

If you are interested in volunteering, or are otherwise interested in learning more about the Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta, please visit www.pbpatl.org or contact Rachel Spears at (404) 407-5059 or rachel.spears@pbpatl.org.