



BAR NEWS | Volunteer Spotlight

Kerwin's work on pro bono project helps those in financial distress

BY CHELSEA HILDRETH

Robert J. Kerwin, a former Massachusetts Bar Association Business Law Section chair and past president of the City Solicitor Town Counsel Association, devotes a considerable amount of time and energy to pro bono efforts. Having worked for Tarlow, Breed, Hart & Rodgers PC as a business litigator for 15 years, Kerwin uses his resources to help those in need.

He is urging others throughout the state to join him.

Kerwin helped initiate the MBA Bankruptcy Pro Bono Assistance Project to connect lawyers with indigent clients in need of workout and bankruptcy assistance. "If this initiative can get lawyers throughout the state to help where they can, then so many more lives will be made easier," he said.

Kerwin's original inspiration for this important project came last year when MBA President Valerie A. Yarashus visited his firm to discuss the importance of community service.

"Working through these pro bono Chapter 7 cases gives me a deeper appreciation of how the recent financial crisis severely affects people," said Kerwin, primarily a creditors' rights attorney. "It makes me realize that we are all a few steps away from a



ROBERT J. KERWIN

serious medical crisis or job loss that could put us in an extreme financial situation."

Kerwin and firm colleague Michael Dominick recently took a pro bono case that highlights the tremendous needs of such clients. Hounded by credit collectors and with numerous unpaid medical bills, a client needs to file for a Chapter 7 bankruptcy.

"Filing for bankruptcy will allow her to focus on getting her life back together," said Kerwin, who notes that there are many other MBA lawyers who are contributing significantly in this area. "Mostly every lawyer I know is doing something formally or informally," he said.

The MBA Bankruptcy Pro Bono

Assistance Project began in 2009 when Leslie Storm, the Boston pro se clerk for the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, expressed her need for assistance with those filing for Chapter 7 Bankruptcy. Storm was put in contact with the MBA's Business Law Section Council to discuss setting up this program. Storm met with Kerwin and current Business Law Section Co-Chair Francis Morrissey to begin developing a network of attorneys throughout the state to whom Storm could refer pro se clients.

Now, with the encouragement of Susan Prosnitz, director of the Rappaport Center for Law and Public Service at Suffolk University Law School, Kerwin hopes the MBA will soon offer pro bono training programs through the center.

"It's our goal to increase involvement in this project statewide because there are so many more people who need help," Kerwin said.

Through his work with this meaningful project, Kerwin is reminded often of why he went to law school: "I went to enhance my ability to help people, and there is nothing better than helping someone get their life back."

Attorneys interested in participating in the MBA Pro Bono Assistance Project should contact Kerwin at rkerwin@tbhr-law.com. ■