

Corporate Counsel Attorneys May Now Provide Pro Bono Legal Services in Ohio

By Erin Cunniff Childs & Virginia Conlan Whitman



The Supreme Court of Ohio recently passed an amendment allowing attorneys with corporate counsel status to provide direct pro bono legal services to persons of limited means or charitable organizations. Prior to this amendment, attorneys admitted to practice in Ohio under corporate counsel status were only allowed to perform legal services for their employer. Now the path has been cleared for some 300 in-house attorneys to help fill the pro bono services gap in Ohio and utilize their legal skills to engage with individuals and non-profits in the Greater Cincinnati area through pro bono service.

The caveat to this expansion is that the pro bono work must be assigned to the corporate counsel attorney by an approved pro bono provider. Locally, the Cincinnati Bar Association, Volunteer Lawyers Project, and Pro Bono Partnership of Greater Cincinnati are all approved pro bono providers.

Since the amendment became effective on April 1, 2015, the Pro Bono Partnership of Greater Cincinnati has already had several corporate status attorneys from in-house legal departments volunteer to represent nonprofits with their business legal needs. Alison Tan, Senior Counsel at Procter & Gamble,

From Rule VI, Section 3(E) of the Rules for the government of the Bar of Ohio:

Section 3(E): Pro bono legal service.

[A]n attorney registered for corporate status under this section may provide pro bono legal service if the legal service is provided to either a person of limited means or a charitable organization and the legal service is assigned or verified by any of the following:

1. An organization receiving funding for pro bono programs or services from the Legal Services Corporation or the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation;
2. A metropolitan or county bar association;
3. The Ohio State Bar Association;
4. The Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation;
5. Any other organization recognized by the [CLE] Commission

Local Approved Pro Bono Providers:



Cincinnati Bar Association



- **Cincinnati Bar Association**
LaDonna Wallace Smith (lwsmith@cincybar.org)
- **Pro Bono Partnership of Greater Cincinnati*:**
Erin Childs (erin@probonocincy.org)
- **Volunteer Lawyers Project*:**
Ginny Whitman (gwhitman@lascinti.org)

**Both Legal Aid and Pro Bono Partnership provide malpractice insurance for their attorney volunteers*

is currently assisting a local nonprofit register its trademark. “The rule change has given me the opportunity to do my part for non-profits, utilizing my specialized set of legal skills in the trademarks and licensing field.”

Sushupta T. Sudarshan, counsel for GE Aviation, agrees: “Before joining GE, I practiced law in Washington, D.C. for 8 years and regularly participated in pro bono activities with the Washington D.C. Legal Aid Society and Catholic Charities. These were very rewarding experiences for me, professionally and personally, and allowed me to contribute some badly needed legal advice to under-served members of the community. [The new rule] enables me to offer my legal services and contribute to the advancement of the Bar of Ohio’s mission on pro bono service.” Sudarshan is currently advising a nonprofit on copyright issues.

If you are a corporate status attorney in the Greater Cincinnati area, please consider contacting one of the approved pro bono providers to learn how you can get involved.

Childs is executive director of Pro Bono Partnership of Greater Cincinnati. Whitman is managing attorney of the Volunteer Lawyers Project.