



NYSBA News Release

FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

Date: May 27, 2020

Contact: Susan DeSantis

sdesantis@nysba.org

201-575-5756

STATE BAR ASSOCIATION PROVIDES PRO BONO ATTORNEYS IN SMALL ESTATE CASES INVOLVING COVID-19 DEATHS

As the COVID-19 death toll mounts, pro bono assistance is desperately needed to deal expeditiously with the thousands of Surrogate's Court applications in small estates, so the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) has launched an effort to match volunteer lawyers with economically disadvantaged families who have lost loved ones to the virus and need help settling uncontested small estates.

This special collaboration between the state bar association and the state's Unified Court System is led by Michael Miller, past NYSBA president and a long-time trusts and estates attorney.

"The New York legal community has always risen to the task in times of crisis," said Chief Judge Janet DiFiore. "I am grateful to Michael Miller and New York State Bar Association President Hank Greenberg for their leadership on this vital program and to our bar leaders and members throughout the state for their ongoing generosity in response to the immense legal needs of New Yorkers resulting from the pandemic."

"With more than 23,000 coronavirus deaths in New York and counting, we expect a surge of COVID-19-related estate cases in New York City and across the state, disproportionately involving the poor and minorities," said NYSBA President Hank Greenberg. "We're honored that Chief Judge Janet DiFiore has called upon the state bar association to spearhead this critically important effort to help New Yorkers suffering the loss of a loved one."

"We're not first responders but we lawyers are uniquely qualified to help our fellow grieving New Yorkers in their time of need," said Miller. "This program is in the finest tradition of pro bono publico. It's not just a good thing to do; it's the right thing to do."

Miller added that small estates are typically pro se - handled by individuals without legal representation -- and as a result those matters require greater scrutiny by court staff. He noted that the pro bono effort will therefore also help avoid unnecessary delays for all Surrogate's Court matters.

To match clients with volunteer attorneys, NYSBA has developed an easy-to-use online portal <https://nysba.org/surrogatescourt/> for the Surrogate's Court pro bono effort.

Attorneys interested in volunteering can [click here](#) to register now. Volunteers attorneys are required to take a mandatory CLE training to be eligible to receive referrals. A link to the mandatory training is available at the volunteer sign up page.

In April, NYSBA announced a partnership with the court system to ensure that pro bono legal assistance is available to New Yorkers struggling to address legal issues that have arisen as a result of the pandemic.

The task force overseeing this effort, led by former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, is already coordinating a pro bono program to assist those denied unemployment benefits. It has also appointed a working group to find ways to help settle disputes between landlords and financially struggling tenants suffering from the coronavirus or its economic fallout.

For more information regarding NYSBA and the state court system's pro bono network please visit: <https://nysba.org/ny-state-court-system-joins-with-new-york-state-bar-association-to-launch-pro-bono-network-to-respond-to-pandemic/>.

In addition, NYSBA has transformed its website and social media accounts into hubs of legal information regarding the COVID-19 crisis. Learn more at: <https://nysba.org/coronavirus>.

About the New York State Bar Association

The New York State Bar Association is the largest voluntary state bar association in the nation. Since 1876, NYSBA has helped shape the development of law, educated and informed the legal profession and the public, and championed the rights of New Yorkers through advocacy and guidance in our communities.

###