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Pro Bono News

During a time of crisis, lawyers and law firms step up to help the less fortunate—and that's especially true at Bodman.

Here's a look at the pro bono work we are doing during the pandemic, including a State Bar of Michigan project that provides free estate planning to front line healthcare workers, police officers, firefighters and paramedics.

Frontline Responders

The State Bar of Michigan has organized volunteer lawyers to help front line crisis workers with free estate planning. Eligible front line workers: those in medical facilities who are directly involved in the diagnosis and treatment of Covid-19 patients as well as ambulance crews, the cleaning crews that support front line efforts, police, firefighters and EMTs. Volunteer attorneys provide a basic will as well as medical and financial directives. Bodman volunteers to date: *Erin Mendez, Fred Hoops, Julia Massaro, Jennifer Long, Chris Rambus, and Evangeline Nketia*. The project is scheduled to close on June 12, 2020. Information for volunteers and front line workers can be found here.

MCR's Nonprofit and Small Business Covid-19 Legal Clinic

Michigan Community Resources (MCR) matches volunteer attorneys with nonprofits and small business owners who need legal assistance during the Covid-19 crisis. Attorneys are available for 45-minute consultations, and some clients return to Bodman for more in-depth pro bono representation following the initial consultation. This is a great way for business attorneys to interact with and assist the local business community during a pandemic.   Bodman volunteers to date: *Nicholas McElhinny, Joseph Morrison, Rebecca Seguin-Skrabucha, Michael Melfi, Mary Cebula, Courtland Anderson, Tyler Schofield, Andrew Spilkin, Garret Haddon, Jonathan Burleigh*.

Oakland County Jail, early release motions

As part of a coordinated effort with the State Appellate Defender Office (SADO), volunteer attorneys filed motions to release prisoners from the Oakland County Jail in light of the Covid-19 crisis. Bodman volunteers to date: *Justin Bagdady, Erica Shell, Katelyn Young, Stephen Staple, Jacob Simon.*

Success story: Jacob Simon's client, Ms. C., had served two-thirds of a one-year jail sentence for felony drunk driving and was not expecting release from the jail until August 2020. Jacob filed a motion for early release on May 19, 2020, and the motion was granted on May 20, 2020. Ms. C., who had an offer of employment and supportive family and friends, was home by the Memorial Day weekend.

Success story: When *Erica Shell* filed a motion for Mr. B, he had served nearly two-thirds of a one-year jail sentence for unarmed robbery and was not expecting release until August. The trial judge ruled in favor of a sentence reduction and granted the motion on June 10, 2020. Mr. B was released on June 11, 2020.

Michigan Department of Corrections

Brent Scott and Justin Bagdady drafted a motion for temporary restraining order and permanent injunction for a class action lawsuit filed by MSU Law's Civil Rights Clinic challenging the Michigan Department of Corrections' failure to adhere to CDC guidelines for social distancing and cleaning supplies in the Michigan prison system. The case is currently at the discovery stage before the Honorable Mark A. Goldsmith, and no settlement has been reached.

Burial assistance during pandemic

Michelle Czapski recently worked to facilitate the burial of a young man who died during the pandemic. The young man left a life insurance policy that paid proceeds to his 14-year-old sister. The life insurance proceeds were needed for his burial. Michelle quickly acted to file an emergency motion for conservatorship with the probate court, and the motion was granted. The funds were distributed and the young man was buried shortly thereafter.

This is a mere sample of the valuable and meaningful work we do at Bodman. We are also committed to helping victims of the Midland dam disaster, we are developing racial justice opportunities and we have started a new commutation project for Michigan prisoners.