

The Allegheny County Bar Foundation Introduces

Small Business Legal Assistance Program

The Public Service Committee of the Allegheny County Bar Association is pleased to announce a new program providing free (pro bono) legal assistance for small businesses that cannot afford legal representation.

When legal issues are not addressed upfront (often because of the cost associated with securing appropriate legal advice), they can blossom into larger legal or compliance problems down the road, and in certain circumstances, can threaten the business's very survival. Recognizing this problem, the Public Service Committee has created the Small Business Legal Assistance Program to help small businesses in our region proactively address legal issues before they become unmanageable. Small businesses are important economic drivers for our region, and we have designed this program to help small businesses survive and thrive, thus enabling them to provide economic and other benefits to the region.

The new Small Business Legal Assistance Program essentially works as a matching service between eligible small businesses and volunteer attorneys. Volunteer attorneys are available in the following areas:

1. Employment law: general legal advice, drafting of basic documents
2. Tax law: general legal advice
3. Intellectual property: general legal advice, trademark or copyright filings
4. Corporate law: choice of entity, entity formation, corporate filings (client responsible for all filing fees), general legal advice on filing requirements, obtaining any necessary licenses or registrations
5. Contracts: contract review, drafting of basic contracts, reviewing loan documents
6. Leases: review or negotiation of leases, landlord/tenant issues
7. Small claims litigation (before district magistrates)

A small business or potential small business seeking assistance through the program will submit an application that identifies the nature of its business, the type of legal advice sought (from the above categories) and briefly describes the issue for which advice is sought. If the small business is deemed eligible, attorneys who volunteered for the relevant area of law will be notified of the pro bono opportunity and asked whether they will accept the matter. In order to be eligible for this program, the client must be operating or starting a business for profit, have fewer than 10 employees, have or intend to have a principal place of business in Allegheny County, and demonstrate that the business owners' income is less than 250% of the current HHS Poverty Guidelines.

Pro bono services through this program are limited to ten (10) hours unless the attorney and his/her firm agree to a separate, further representation outside of this program. If the applicant's legal issue cannot reasonably be resolved in this time period, the application will be returned with an explanation that it exceeds the scope of this program.

Applications for assistance are available at http://www.pittsburghprobono.org/pdf/SBLAP_application.pdf. For more information about the program, please visit: http://www.pittsburghprobono.org/Public_Legal_Services/Small_Business_Legal_Assistance.asp.