

Pro Bono – Law Firms

Cozen's Pro Bono Program: An Example of Lawyering At Its Best

The Editor interviews **Douglas B. Fox**, Member of Cozen O'Connor and Chair of the firm's Pro Bono Committee.

Editor: What does your role as chair of Cozen O'Connor's Pro Bono Committee involve?

Fox: I chair our firmwide pro bono committee, comprised of attorneys from our 23 offices, including our Toronto and London locations. In addition, I assist management in developing goals for the program as well as in gauging its effectiveness. Also, I ensure that the cases meet our pro bono guidelines – we follow the guidelines promulgated by the Pro Bono Institute in Washington, D.C. – and that there are no conflicts in accepting these matters.

Because each community where we practice is unique, and the attorneys have their own special interests and strengths, we give the offices wide latitude to develop programs of relevance to them. For example, our Seattle office has historically had a strong interest in an immigration and asylum practice, and, therefore, that has become its focus. Here, in Philadelphia, we have always been dedicated to supporting child advocacy and homeless advocacy, and many of our attorneys have chosen to concentrate in those pro bono areas.

Editor: The *Philadelphia Business Journal* recently ranked Cozen O'Connor as one of the top law firms in its Corporate Charitable Contributor's List. The firm received five awards, including Top In-Kind Services Donor in the large company category for its dedication to pro bono work. What distinguishes Cozen O'Connor's pro bono initiative?

Fox: Several qualities distinguish our pro bono program. Our geographic breadth and depth of practice areas, both transactional and litigation, afford us the opportunity to handle a tremendous range of pro bono matters, from assisting charitable nonprofits to handling death penalty litigation and international cases. Over the time that we have had our current pro bono guidelines in place, the program has really flourished. It's something we are very proud of here.

In addition to dedicating nearly 14,000 hours of free legal services last year, our attorneys are also incredibly active in the communities where they live and work. They serve on boards of directors and as volunteers in community, religious and service organizations.

Editor: Is Cozen's pro bono initiative an integral part of the firm and its culture?

Fox: It is truly a top-down program. Our CEO, Tad Decker, has been a tremendously strong supporter of the program. Senior attorneys at the firm have also been personally involved in many pro bono efforts. For example, Patrick O'Connor, our previous CEO, headed a team handling a high-visibility death penalty case and won a very favorable



Douglas B. Fox

result for our client. Recently, Bob Fiebach, one of our members and a past president of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, handled a child custody case, while Fred Jacoby, our vice chair, managed a pro bono matter for a local nonprofit organization involving a claim against it under the Americans with Disabilities Act. So, these leaders really set the tone for the firm, and mentor, train, and partner with less senior lawyers to build the next generation of pro bono leadership. This has never been a firm where pro bono work is solely the province of new associates. The mindset starts at the top and filters down through the entire organization.

Editor: You mentioned Cozen's geographic reach, both nationally and internationally, and its diverse practice areas. How do pro bono clients benefit from this?

Fox: Our many locations allow us to have multiple attorneys on the ground to coordinate efforts, which often cross state lines or even national boundaries. There are a couple of examples I can provide. Currently, most of our offices are working with Bet Tzedek Legal Services in Los Angeles on a national program to assist Holocaust survivors making reparations claims arising from work in German-controlled ghettos during World War II. The German government has approved various compensation programs over the years, but this new program, in effect since October 2007, fills an important gap by compensating victims who provided "voluntary" labor in the ghettos. Attorneys will be assisting victims in completing the very technical application required by the German government.

We also coordinated one pro bono initiative out of our Houston office that entailed working with attorneys in Puerto Rico to gain freedom for a Puerto Rican resident who was detained in Texas. The case was closely followed by the press in Puerto Rico. So, given the number of offices we have and the depth of both our litigation and transactional practices, we are well-equipped to handle such multi-jurisdiction cases.

Editor: On the litigation side, tell me more about some of the signature cases the firm handles.

Fox: We are currently handling a high-profile case, *Lozano v. Hazleton*, involving a challenge to the Hazleton, PA., illegal immigration ordinances. Our team of six attorneys has dedicated thousands of hours to this case – our single largest pro bono matter to date. Lost in the rancorous debate over immigration policy is the fact that the *Hazleton* case does not seek to vindicate illegal immigration. Our clients simply sought to restore immigration enforcement to the federal government – where it belongs. We were successful after a two-week trial in striking down key elements of the ordinances, and currently, the case is on appeal to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. A ruling is probably several months away.

The case has made national headlines and was highlighted by the *National Law Journal* as one of the most significant pro bono matters of 2007, with the tagline for their article being "What Lawyering is All About." And, that really says it all. Firm management deserves a great deal of credit for having the courage to take on an unpopular cause, one that many law firms would have shied away from. We have received many honors for our pro bono work, including in the *Hazleton* case. This kind of recognition for the quality of our pro bono lawyering is what makes me the most proud.

Editor: On the transactional side, I understand that you've helped several nonprofits launch or grow their operations. What are some of these success stories?

Fox: We have a very active pro bono practice forming and guiding charities and other nonprofits. One of our attorneys recently helped set up a nonprofit to assist children with serious illness and disease. Another example would be our work with The Voice Foundation, headquartered in Philadelphia. We recently helped it chart a course toward successful national expansion. We are also assisting many arts-related entities, including the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia, which is the premier regional arts venue. And, we do a lot of work with artists, from painters to playwrights to budding film companies, under the aegis of various arts organizations including the Philadelphia Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and the New Jersey Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts. These are just a few of the cases where our transactional strength comes into play.

Editor: You often partner with inside counsel to maximize pro bono efforts. Explain these arrangements, and please provide some examples.

Fox: Corporate clients want, and increasingly demand, that their law firm partners are committed to pro bono

work. As just one example, Exelon Corporation is dedicated to supporting pro bono work at a very high level, and partners with Cozen O'Connor and its other law firms on a number of initiatives, including the Wills for Heroes Program, and the Homeless Advocacy Project in Philadelphia. Cozen O'Connor also hosted a joint training class with Glaxo-SmithKline in Philadelphia to train attorneys and their staff on handling uncontested adoption cases in the Philadelphia courts. And, the firm has worked with individual lawyers from Rohm & Haas, Corporation Service Company and other corporate clients on individual projects that were important to them.

We are actively seeking other partnerships on pro bono matters. We'd like to grow our alliances with our large insurance client base – and work with their inside counsel to maximize pro bono efforts. In addition to expanding this area, there is tremendous opportunity to increase partnerships with our corporate clients.

Editor: Ultimately, what are the advantages of these collaborations for the nonprofits and individuals involved?

Fox: A corporate law firm partnership serving pro bono clients benefits everyone. The law firms develop a closer relationship with the corporate or insurance company partner. And, the pro bono clients get the benefit of law firm resources coupled with the unique perspective offered by the corporate or insurance company partner. It's a win-win situation.

Editor: Beyond your pro bono case work, what other civic activities does Cozen O'Connor support?

Fox: Our attorneys are actively involved in a broad array of civic and social service groups, senior citizens' organizations, religious groups, colleges, universities, charitable nonprofits, etc. Cozen O'Connor donates a significant amount each year to local civic and charitable organizations. We partnered with one of our insurance company clients, AIG, and donated thousands of dollars after the Indian Ocean tsunami through the Indonesian relief efforts. What's more, the firm and its individual employees donated more than \$75,000 to Hurricane Katrina efforts. Last year, the firm and its charitable foundation supported over 230 community-based organizations and charities, and, of course, individual attorneys support their own causes in many different ways. It truly is an honor to be associated with the program because of the active participation by so many of our attorneys, and the strength of the firm and its historical commitment to pro bono.

Editor: The work that you and your firm are doing is most impressive. I am delighted that we could highlight some of its many aspects.

Please email the interviewee at dfox@cozen.com with questions about this interview.