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ASSOCIATION OF PRO BONO COUNSEL STATEMENT ON A COORDINATED LAW FIRM PRO BONO RESPONSE TO COVID-19

March 20, 2020

The Association of Pro Bono Counsel (APBCo) today released the following statement on its members' plans for a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

We have repeatedly witnessed our members and their firms come together to coordinate and respond to legal needs generated in times of crisis. APBCo members were part of the response to Super Storm Sandy in the New York region, the Trump Administration's Travel Ban, the Grenfell Tower Fire in London, Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in Texas and Louisiana, multiple wildfires in California, and the separation of migrant families at the US-Mexico border. Already in 2020, Australian members of APBCo have been part of the legal community response to the devastating bushfires.

Today we face a new crisis on an unprecedented scale – one that spans continents, creating uncertainty and fear in communities around the world.

The legal services and not-for-profit advice and community organizations are the experts in providing legal assistance to those most profoundly affected by COVID-19 and its many ramifications, as it tears through our communities both locally and globally. We work closely with our colleagues in these organizations and are coordinating with them. In the coming days and weeks, we will be taking our cues from them, responding to their needs, and helping them fashion new ways of delivering free legal services where our help is requested.

In addition to developing and implementing new ways to deliver legal services remotely—in light of office closures, limited court access, and many other social distancing measures—there will be many new legal needs arising in multiple areas, from public benefits to housing instability to detention conditions.

We recognize the importance of giving the legal aid organizations time to assess the situation, to ensure their own people are safe and well, and to determine the most effective way to marshal law firm resources. By allowing these organizations the opportunity to digest and assess the quickly-evolving needs of those most affected, we will be able to create well-organized pro bono projects where law firms can be galvanized to

make the greatest impact. Drawing on our collective insight from previous responses, APBCo members are already mobilizing in anticipation of these future conversations. As firms we are connecting, identifying existing resources and considering how to share tasks across firms to create efficiencies and strengthen our collective impact. Acknowledging the global nature of this pandemic, our members are also connecting with non-member firms through regional pro bono networks and initiatives in several continents, recognizing that the issues and discussions in one country may be equally relevant in another, and prioritizing the sharing of information and resources to further support our law firms' capacity to respond.

"The potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income and marginalized populations across the world is catastrophic. APBCo members recognize that no one law firm can lead this pro bono effort alone and ask others to follow," said APBCo Co-President Steven Schulman, Pro Bono Partner at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. "Rather, an effective response will take true coordination, which involves deliberation, cooperation, and collaboration among firms and public interest organizations from the start, for as long as it takes."

"Our firms recognise that the most appropriate pro bono response we can offer is always one which is designed in partnership with the advice and legal service organisations who know their communities best," said APBCo Co-President Rebecca Greenhalgh, Senior Associate & Pro Bono Manager at Ashurst. "Social distancing restrictions present an immediate and significant challenge for these organisations, who must now implement their own business continuity and contingency planning in order to continue serving their communities. We are in contact with them and at the ready."

Notes

The Association of Pro Bono Counsel is a membership organization of more than 250 attorneys and practice group managers who run pro bono practices in more than 100 of the world's largest law firms (www.abpco.org).

APBCo membership is limited to attorneys who manage a law firm practice on at least a 50% basis, and non-attorneys who manage a law firm pro bono practice on a full-time basis or who provide programmatic (not administrative) support to an APBCo member on a full-time basis.

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