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Association of Pro Bono Counsel ("APBCo") Launched to Support Professional Development of Full-Time Pro Bono Counsel at Law Firms

APBCo Hosts First Annual "Pro Bono Academy" in New York City

Boston, MA, January 29, 2008 – Today, the Association of Pro Bono Counsel ("APBCo") publicly announced that it has been established to support the professional development of full-time pro bono counsel at commercial law firms. With over 85 attorney members from across the country, the group's mission is to encourage and support the delivery of free legal services to individuals and nonprofit organizations that cannot afford to hire attorneys.

The ethical rules governing the practice of law in most states encourage attorneys to provide "pro bono" or free legal representation to those unable to pay their fees. In recent years, many premier law firms have developed this aspect of their practice, giving it a more important central role in law firm culture. Hundreds of firms have pledged to devote from 3% - 5% of their annual work done to pro bono practice. Increasingly, law firms are hiring staff counsel dedicated almost exclusively to guiding and advancing their overall pro bono work.

APBCo was conceived in the summer of 2006, when several of these full-time pro bono counsel were comparing notes. "We suddenly realized that there now were enough of us, with a common mission, to be sufficiently defined as a new profession," said Angela Vigil who was at the initial gathering. "We recognized that we had common needs and experience which could be enhanced by having a professional organization."

Shortly thereafter, APBCo was born, with dozens of pro bono counsel joining within months -- a number even larger than the founders had anticipated.

The organization, which operates on an all-volunteer basis, held a national meeting in Washington, DC, formed working committees, and offered panel discussions in conjunction with other organizations' national pro bono conferences. Similar educational programs are on tap for future legal conferences around the country.

In November 2007, group members gathered in New York City for the first annual "APBCo Pro Bono Academy," at which more than 50 attorneys from the nation's major law firms held training sessions and discussion about critical issues in the delivery of pro bono representation. The attorneys, who are essentially full-time pro bono directors for their firms, work to harness resources in their firms to provide free legal assistance to poor and disadvantaged individuals who otherwise could not obtain counsel.

The Pro Bono Academy event focused on such critical skills as how to recruit and train busy commercial lawyers to take on pro bono matters – often in areas outside their regular legal practice, as well as how to manage time and administrative tasks associated with managing a firm's pro bono programs. Experts and professional actors assisted the legal faculty at the event.

"The APBCo Pro Bono Academy is the highlight of a year's work by our members," said Angela Vigil. "Through the Academy, we were able to have candid and highly productive training and discussions about the critical means for providing high quality legal services through the resources of commercial law firms, and to develop a unique focus on what it takes to tap into these resources for the greatest benefit both of those who are in need and of the lawyers themselves."

About APBCo

The Association of Pro Bono Counsel is an organization dedicated to the support and professional development of full-time pro bono counsel at commercial law firms in the United States. Its central mission is support law firm pro bono counsel in enhancing their individual potential and performance in order to encourage the development of the field of pro bono practice management generally, to develop best practices in the field of pro bono practice management and to promote social justice and access to justice.

APBCo is led by a Leadership Council comprised of pro bono counsel from five major law firms including *Debevoise & Plimpton LLP*, *Cooley Godward Kronish LLP*, *Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP*, *Shearman & Sterling LLP*, and *Winston & Strawn LLP*. For more information about APBCo, please visit <http://www.probonocounsel.com>.

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