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LEGAL HELP Corporate attorneys getting together to aid low-income residents Aug. 13.C3
Lawyers offer free legal advice

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Plain Dealer Reporter

Nineteen corporate attorneys from some of the best-known companies in Northeast Ohio will offer their legal expertise to low-income residents on Aug. 13.

The free Brief Advice and Referral Clinic at the West Side Catholic Center, 3135 Lorain Ave., will be the first one in Northeast Ohio staffed entirely by corporate counsels.

All the lawyers belong to the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Association of Corporate Counsels America and are donating their time on behalf of The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

They include P. Kelly Tompkins, president of the Cleveland Bar Association and senior vice president and general counsel for RPM International Inc., and Cynthia Binns, chair of the local ACCA's Pro Bono Committee.

The lawyers will help people with civil matters, such as landlord-tenant disputes, consumer issues and family law problems -- but not with criminal issues such as arrests or traffic tickets, said Sheila Siegel, Jones Day Pro Bono Fellow and coordinator of the Volunteer Lawyers Program at Legal Aid. The lawyers can assist with expungement of criminal records, which is a civil process.

Residents who meet eligibility requirements -- monthly income of \$1,900 or less for a family of four, or \$970 or less for an individual -- are eligible for brief legal advice or a referral.

"We tell them to bring any important papers," Siegel said. "Roughly half the problems can be solved on site, but some problems do need [legal] representation and are referred back to Legal Aid."

Esther Lardent, president of the nonprofit Pro Bono Institute at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C., said having corporate attorneys staffing clinics enriches the participants and their companies.

"All lawyers have an ethical obligation to provide assistance to those who can't afford it, and that includes in-house lawyers," she said. ". . . This is a way for businesses to demonstrate that they are good corporate citizens, and that they do care about giving back to the communities."

Legal Aid's next pro bono clinic will be at 10 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 27, at the St. Martin de Porres Family Center, 1254 East 123rd St. in Cleveland.

It will be staffed by 12 attorneys from McDonald Hopkins Co.

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