Big Law and Legal Aid

Big Law is flourishing, yet legal aid is in crisis. Isn’t it time for more of the nation’s biggest firms and wealthiest lawyers to pledge serious money?

BY SUSAN BECK

ON A MORNING IN LATE APRIL, A YOUNG woman appears in Cleveland housing court without a lawyer. Her mother faces eviction, she tells the judge, but she can’t come to court herself because she’s in the hospital. The judge asks the daughter if she has any documents proving this. She doesn’t.

The judge enters a default judgment for the landlord and orders the mother to move out in 11 days.

Magistrate Judge Myra Torean Embry will call more than 30 eviction cases this morning. With one exception, none of the tenants present have a lawyer. Most likely, they can’t afford one. For more than half the cases, the tenant doesn’t even show, and Embry enters a default judgment for the landlord. Most tenants are given seven days to find new homes.

During a break in the proceedings, Embry says this is a typical day in housing court. “It’s rare to have a tenant with a lawyer,” says Embry, a former legal aid lawyer who has been a housing court judge for 14 years. Even if a tenant hasn’t paid her rent, she can benefit from having a lawyer, she explains. Cases usually settle if a tenant has counsel, and a settlement often gives the tenant more time to move. A settlement also won’t leave an eviction judgment on the tenant’s record, which can harm her credit, and prevent her from qualifying for public housing. In the case of this young woman, a lawyer would likely have known to bring the necessary paperwork, and a default judgment might have been avoided.

Maria Smith, a supervising attorney of the housing unit at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, says they just don’t have the resources to represent most people facing eviction, or other crucial legal problems. The nonprofit is still depleted from the cuts made during the recession, down to 40 lawyers from 55.

It’s crucial, institutional giving by law firms is crucial for legal aid groups, those organizations say.

“We found that the bulk of firms’ charitable donations are directed to other causes, including clients’ pet charities and well-endowed law schools, records show. At the same time, the percentage of law firm pro bono work aimed at helping the poor is declining. Legal aid advocates, however, are largely reluctant to publicly criticize big firms, because they’re so dependent on the funds they do get from them,” says John Levi of Sidley Austin, chairman of the board of directors for the Legal Services Corporation, a federally funded nonprofit that is the single biggest source of legal aid funding in the United States.

Lawyers and firms, especially America’s biggest and most successful ones, have a special responsibility to do more, some observers say. “A big-firm lawyer ought to care that the justice system is working fairly for everyone,” says John Levi of Sidley Austin, chairman of the board of directors for the Legal Services Corporation, a federally funded nonprofit that is the single biggest source of legal aid funding in the United States.

He senses that many big firms could dig deeper into their pockets to support legal aid. “I’m not sure they are,” he says.

Cleveland legal aid lawyer Maria Smith says her group must turn away more than half of those seeking help.

The crisis in legal aid isn’t new. What is new is that since the recession, profits and revenue at Am Law 200 firms are healthy again—in many cases, surging. Last year, the collective revenue of these firms passed the $100 billion mark for the first time. Many recorded all-time highs in revenues and profits, and profits per partner at a dozen firms exceeded $1 million. Yet in our analysis—the first time we’ve looked deeply at firms’ legal aid giving—it appears that the most generous firms contribute little more than one-tenth of 1 percent of their gross revenue to groups that provide basic legal services for the poor, and many fall far below that amount. This doesn’t include individual donations by firm lawyers, which isn’t feasible to track. While individual donations are important, institutional giving by law firms is crucial for legal aid groups, those organizations say.

“Legal aid advocates, however, are largely reluctant to publicly criticize big firms, because they’re so dependent on the funds they do get from them.”

By Susan Beck
a nonprofit that solicits firms to underwrite fellowships for young lawyers to work at nonprofit legal aid groups, says he appreciates the support he gets from big firms, but believes most firms should do more. “When you look at how little they give, it’s pitiful,” he says about law firm giving as a whole. “When you look at how little it appreciates the support he gets from big firms, but believes young lawyers to work at nonprofit legal aid groups, says he a nonprofit that solicits firms to underwrite fellowships for.

Simpson Thacher & Bartlett partner Mark Cunha agrees that the law firm community needs to shift its focus to better help the poor. “An awful lot of discussion you hear about providing legal services revolves around pro bono,” says Cunha, who serves on the board of Legal Services NYC, the second-largest provider of civil legal services for the poor in the city, after The Legal Aid Society of New York. “There should be as much emphasis on financial contributions by lawyers or firms and government as there is on pro bono. There’s no question that legal services lawyers are more efficient in providing the kinds of services needed by low-income people.

The need is great in courthouses everywhere. Take Philadelphia family court, where one day in June a 35-year-old woman sits with her 7-year-old son. She grips a folder with evidence she wants to show the judge, including police reports about her ex-boyfriend. She looks anxious.

“I’ve never been to court before,” she says. “I didn’t even know where to go. I feel like I’m going to throw up.”

“Me, too,” her son says.

“You, too? I’m sorry, baby,” she says, holding her son. She begins to cry.

The woman is here because her ex-boyfriend has filed for a protective order against her. The woman claims that the boy- friend has been abusive to her and her son, but she was scared to take legal action for fear of retaliation.

She seems unaware that she might need a lawyer. “The cops that served me [with the documents for this case] told me I didn’t need an attorney,” she says. Did she know that free legal help might be available? “No, I didn’t know I could get free legal aid,” she says. “I was scared for my life. I was scared for my son’s life.”

When her case is called, she stands before the judge along with her ex- boyfriend. Her hand shakes as she takes the oath. She agrees to let the case go to trial, but she seems confused about the implications. “What does this mean for me?” she asks. When she walks out of the courtroom. She be- gins to cry again. “I don’t have money for a lawyer. I’m supposed to do. I can’t afford my rent. The judge wouldn’t let me say anything or show my evidence. Why?”

Simpson Thacher & Bartlett partner Mark Cunha agrees that the law firm community needs to shift its focus to better help the poor. “An awful lot of discussion you hear about providing legal services revolves around pro bono,” says Cunha, who serves on the board of Legal Services NYC, the second-largest provider of civil legal services for the poor in the city, after The Legal Aid Society of New York. “There should be as much emphasis on financial contributions by lawyers or firms and government as there is on pro bono. There’s no question that legal services lawyers are more efficient in providing the kinds of services needed by low-income people.

The need is great in courthouses everywhere. Take Philadelphia family court, where one day in June a 35-year-old woman sits with her 7-year-old son. She grips a folder with evidence she wants to show the judge, including police reports about her ex-boyfriend. She looks anxious.

“I’ve never been to court before,” she says. “I didn’t even know where to go. I feel like I’m going to throw up.”

“Me, too,” her son says.

“You, too? I’m sorry, baby,” she says, holding her son. She begins to cry.

The woman is here because her ex-boyfriend has filed for a protective order against her. The woman claims that the boy- friend has been abusive to her and her son, but she was scared to take legal action for fear of retaliation.

She seems unaware that she might need a lawyer. “The cops that served me [with the documents for this case] told me I didn’t need an attorney,” she says. Did she know that free legal help might be available? “No, I didn’t know I could get free legal aid,” she says. “I was scared for my life. I was scared for my son’s life.”

When her case is called, she stands before the judge along with her ex- boyfriend. Her hand shakes as she takes the oath. She agrees to let the case go to trial, but she seems confused about the implications. “What does this mean for me?” she asks. When she walks out of the courtroom. She be- gins to cry again. “I don’t have money for a lawyer. I’m supposed to do. I can’t afford my rent. The judge wouldn’t let me say anything or show my evidence. Why?”

Even if this woman tried to get a legal aid lawyer, she’d likely be out of luck. Roughly 11,000 requests for protec- tive orders are filed each year in Philadelphia County. Su- san Pearlstein, supervising attorney for the family law unit at Philadelphia Legal Assistance, says they have to turn away 95 percent of the people who request their help. “We don’t have the resources,” she says. Overall, Philadelphia Legal Assistance has 35 lawyers, a drop of 10 lawyers over the last several years. Kathleen O’Malley, managing attorney of Philadelphia-based Women Against Abuse, says her group has three lawyers who work on protective order cases, but they can barely put a dent in the demand. What does her group need most? “Money. More grants and more funding, so we can hire more attorneys.”

WHAT LAW FIRMS GIVE
Votes have come from individual lawyers and law firms of all sizes accounts for 7 percent of total legal aid funding: They gave $95.8 million in 2013, according to the American Bar As- sociation, out of $1.885 billion in funding from all sources. It’s not clear how much of that $95.8 million was contributed by Am Law 200 firms. Even if the entire amount came from those firms, which didn’t fund this would represent less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the firms’ collective revenue of $96.3 billion that year.

The Pro Bono Institute, which is best known for encour- aging pro bono work, also collects data about law firm finan- cial contributions to legal aid groups. Each year it asks firms to answer an optional question about those contributions. The PBI’s data shows that the median law firm contribu- tion in 2014 was $155,000 based on responses supplied by 63 firms. Only five firms gave more than $1 million. The average contribution was $156,503.

When we asked the largest and most profitable firms how much they gave last year to legal services groups helping the poor, the response was mixed. Most firm leaders didn’t want to discuss the topic on the record, let alone disclose data. Others made it clear they didn’t welcome those questions.

One of the few leaders who discussed this topic publicly was William Voge, the chairman of Latham & Watkins, the top-grossing firm in The Am Law 100. “I think Big Law should do more. Whatever we’re doing can’t be enough, giv- en the demand for legal services out there,” he says. Last year Latham’s revenue jumped 14 percent, to $2.6 billion, and profits per partner were up 16.1 percent. “I am responsible for $2.9 million. Voge did not disclose Latham’s legal aid contributions, saying that it would be difficult to collect that information and would be misleading without counting individual contributions from partners, which would be even harder to determine. “You could not look at the firm’s contribution alone and have it be representative of what the firm does,” he says.

Four firms did agree to disclose their level of giving to legal aid. Kirkland & Ellis ($2.6 million), Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison ($1.5 million), Reed Smith ($100,000), and Sidley Austin ($2.1 million). The highest level of giving as a percentage of revenue was at Paul Weiss: its $1.5 million

The negligible in -

It’s important that firms to do pro bono work, but the most efficient way to aid the poor who need legal help is to give money to legal aid groups, experts say. Donating is shrinking 40 percent in 10 years, and it’s not clear how it will fare in the current federal budget process. President Barack Obama has asked that its funding be increased from $175 million to $452 million for the new fiscal year, which begins October 1. The House Appropriations Committee has adopted a bill that would cut LSC’s budget by $75 mil- lion, down to $100 million, while the Senate Appropriations Committee approved $185 million. At press time, it wasn’t clear how this would be resolved. Another dire funding problem for legal services is the dwindling money from IOLTA—interest on lawyer trust ac-

private fundraising from the community who desperately need them.”

The American Lawyer   |   July 2015

The ABA’s Model rules, which aren’t binding on lawyers, the American Bar Association Source: American Lawyer

services corp. 23% state legislatures 10% other public-funds 19%

23% 10% 19%

interest rates that

1% 5% 10% other 8% foundations/corporations 5% legal community 7%

DUI 5%

legal aid

Other contributions and funding from the legal aid community have accounted for 10 percent of total funding for legal aid since the ABA started tracking legal aid funding in 2002. In 2008 IOLTA produced $240 million for legal aid, by 2013 the amount was down to $74.5 million—the lowest figure since the ABA started tracking legal aid funding in 2002. The ABA’s Model Rules, which aren’t binding on lawyers, say that a lawyer should voluntarily give financial support to organizations that provide legal services to people of limited

munity who desperately need them.”

Private contributions to legal aid have become increas- ingly important, given the precarious nature of public sup- port. The federally funded Legal Services Corporation is the largest single source of legal aid funding, which represents less than one-fourth of total support. The balance comes from a patchwork of sources, including state and local appropria- tions, interest on client funds, and private fundraising from lawyers and law firms. Adjusted for inflation, LSC’s fund-

While we and our peer firms can always do more, I’m proud of the work that we and others in our community do to try to make legal services available to those members of our com-
Big Law’s Beloved Charities

Many firms direct the bulk of their charitable contributions to a range of groups other than legal aid, according to public filings made by foundations that some firms have set up for charitable giving. Kirkland & Ellis, for example, has one of the most generous law firm foundations. According to the foundation’s most recent filing with the Internal Revenue Service, the firm donated $8.2 million to 104 charitable groups in 2013. Of those donations, 21 percent, or $1.7 million, went to groups that provide legal services to the poor.

The firm’s largest contribution, $591,580, went to Northwestern University, where firm chairman Jeffrey Hammes serves as chairman of the university’s law school board.

The Justice Gap

The Justice Gap is a national program to increase the number of legal aid lawyers serving poor clients. In 2013, the program’s first year, 11 firms met the challenge of paying $1,000 per lawyer. Currently, 43 firms report their donations to Ernst & Young. (The companies give all the money to the Legal Services Corporation’s roughly 280 civil lawyers aren’t enough. He estimates it would take well over 1,000 lawyers to meet needs.

One factor in this funding crisis is that The Legal Aid Society’s $600 per lawyer law firm pledge level hasn’t changed in 19 years, since it was set in 1996. Chairman Richard Davis acknowledges that the board, which consists mostly of partners from Am Law 100 firms, has been reluctant to raise this amount. “People say, ‘Why don’t you increase it?’” says Davis, a former Weil, Gotshal & Manges partner who now has a solo practice. “But we don’t want to compromise our relationship [with these firms] by increasing it to more.”

Vice-chairman Blaine “Fin” Fogg of Skadden says he’s discussed raising this amount with a number of Skadden’s law firm colleagues. He notes that Covington participates at the highest level in The Chicago Bar Foundation, the charitable arm of the Chicago Bar Association, which supports eight to 10 fellows a year. Stern officials say they have been educating firms on the importance of keeping track of that type of work.

Data gathered by The American Lawyer for its annual pro bono survey supports the PBIs’ findings. When asked to list their highest pro bono project of 2014, the majority of firms...
Several firms, however, listed projects aimed at addressing the access-to-justice crisis of the poor. Davis Polk & Wardwell lawyers logged more than 2,000 hours last year helping more than 100 low-income homeowners victimized by fraudulent mortgage modification practices. Hunter & Williams runs two clinics for low-income individuals in Virginia; other firms periodically offer clinics, too.

Getting big firms to handle evictions, custody and child support disputes, and consumer debt cases can be a hard sell to lawyers who would rather work on sexy headline-making cases. “It can seem too unfamiliar, even for an experienced litigator,” says LSC’s Sandman. “People don’t want to embarrass themselves.” Sandman says he’s made it his mission to urge firms to devote more pro bono time to helping the poor with their basic legal needs, and accepts every opportunity he’s offered to speak at law firms about this.

Covington & Burling chairman Hester says he was inspired by Sandman’s talk at his firm to represent a tenant in housing court. It was satisfying, he says, but admits it wasn’t as stimulating as death penalty defense work, which he’s done for more than 10 years. “It doesn’t grab your intellectual attention in the same way as a thorny death penalty appeal,” he says. Still, he and others at Covington have been discussing ways to get the firm’s lawyers to do more work like this. “The question is, how do we encourage people to see this work for the poor in our local community as sufficiently engaging?”

Lisa Dewey, the pro bono partner at DLA Piper, says she’s been increasingly thinking about why firms can address the basic legal needs of the poor. “People shouldn’t avoid this work because it’s not sexy enough,” she says. “This is really important stuff.” The firm has helped create and run legal clinics in Baltimore and Chicago and at Veteran’s Administration hospitals. In March, DLA Piper and Arent Fox announced a novel collaboration with Georgetown University Law Center to open a “low bono” law firm that helps low-income people who make too much to qualify for free legal aid, but who still can’t afford a lawyer at market rates. The D.C. Affordable Law Firm is slated to start taking clients in the fall.

DLA Piper’s Dewey says the firm is also thinking beyond traditional models of legal help. “The crisis is so bad,” says Dewey. “There’s no way everybody who needs a lawyer will get one. We’ll have to come up with new solutions, whether we’re using nonlawyers or self-help resource centers.”

Gellen Cotter, executive director of the Council of Legal Aid Society, says some simple changes wouldn’t cost much but could make a huge difference. Court forms, for example, should be written in plain English. “The terms ‘petitioner’ and ‘respondent’—it’s not clear to most people what that means,” she says. LSC’s Sandman agrees. “We have a system that is largely built by lawyers for lawyers,” he says.

On a Saturday morning in late May, dozens of people sit quietly in a waiting room at the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Health Center on the east side of Cleveland, where the Cleveland Legal Aid Society is holding a clinic. It’s staffed mostly with young lawyers doing pro bono work from Squire Patton Boggs, in- house lawyers from the Cleveland Clinic and local law school students.

One young woman has a dispute with her former employer, who runs a beauty salon where she apprenticed. “He made me work without pay, and I didn’t get my final paycheck,” she says. Although she was working for minimum wage, she says she was forced to sign a noncompete agreement preventing

Mona Smith and a client in Smith’s office. “I could work 24/7,” she says, “but not finish the work, she says.”

Reporter Anita Abedian contributed to this article. Email: aba@alm.com.

### The Justice Gap

We asked the most profitable firms and those with the largest U.S. presence about their financial support for legal aid.

We also reviewed public records on charitable giving where possible. Firms with an asterisk (*) disclosed their legal aid contributions.

**The 10 Most Profitable Firms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Lawyers in U.S.</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>PPP</th>
<th>Legal Aid Giving 2014</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whitelaw, Lyttle, Reagon &amp; Katz*</td>
<td>1,016</td>
<td>$1.072 billion</td>
<td>$1,166</td>
<td>$3.5 million</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton &amp; Garrison*</td>
<td>1,016</td>
<td>$1.052 billion</td>
<td>$1,151</td>
<td>$3.4 million</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidwell &amp; Crewdson</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>$670 million</td>
<td>$665</td>
<td>$3.5 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkland &amp; Ellis</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>$351.5 billion</td>
<td>$349</td>
<td>$3.3 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpson Thacher &amp; Bartlett</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>$295.4 million</td>
<td>$290</td>
<td>$3.1 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cravath, Swaine &amp; Moore</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>$233.4 million</td>
<td>$230</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan &amp; Cromwell</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>$215.2 million</td>
<td>$210</td>
<td>$2.8 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latham &amp; Watkins</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>$181.5 million</td>
<td>$178</td>
<td>$2.7 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cravath, Swaine &amp; Moore</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>$78.1 million</td>
<td>$77.3</td>
<td>$0.8 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The 10 Firms With the Most Lawyers In the U.S.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Lawyers in U.S.</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>PPP</th>
<th>Legal Aid Giving 2014</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morgan, Lewis &amp; Bockius</td>
<td>1,676</td>
<td>$1.166 billion</td>
<td>$1,076</td>
<td>$3.6 million</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groggerhaus Traupin</td>
<td>1,676</td>
<td>$1.145 billion</td>
<td>$1,071</td>
<td>$3.2 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidley &amp; Austin</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,145</td>
<td>$3.1 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skadden</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.287 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkland &amp; Ellis</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latham &amp; Watkins</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan &amp; Cromwell</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skadden</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkland &amp; Ellis</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latham &amp; Watkins</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan &amp; Cromwell</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notable Firms and What They Gave**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Lawyers in U.S.</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>PPP</th>
<th>Legal Aid Giving 2014</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dewey &amp; Levey</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.287 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.2 million</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groggerhaus Traupin</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,217</td>
<td>$3.0 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidney &amp; Austin</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>$1.217 billion</td>
<td>$1,145</td>
<td>$3.1 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skadden</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>$1.166 billion</td>
<td>$1,076</td>
<td>$3.6 million</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkland &amp; Ellis</td>
<td>2,350</td>
<td>$1.145 billion</td>
<td>$1,071</td>
<td>$3.2 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latham &amp; Watkins</td>
<td>2,121</td>
<td>$1.082 billion</td>
<td>$1,006</td>
<td>$2.8 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan &amp; Cromwell</td>
<td>2,121</td>
<td>$1.082 billion</td>
<td>$1,006</td>
<td>$2.8 million</td>
<td>Foundation: New</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: National Center for Access to Justice; ABA

**Legal Aid Giving 2014:** some simple changes wouldn’t cost much but could make a huge difference.

Court forms, for example, should be written in plain English. “The terms ‘petitioner’ and ‘respondent’—it’s not clear to most people what that means,” she says. LSC’s Sandman agrees. “We have a system that is largely built by lawyers for lawyers,” he says.

On a Saturday morning in late May, dozens of people sit quietly in a waiting room at the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Health Center on the east side of Cleveland, where the Cleveland Legal Aid Society is holding a clinic. It’s staffed mostly with young lawyers doing pro bono work from Squire Patton Boggs, in-house lawyers from the Cleveland Clinic and local law school students.

One young woman has a dispute with her former employer, who runs a beauty salon where she apprenticed. “He made me work without pay, and I didn’t get my final paycheck,” she says. Although she was working for minimum wage, she says she was forced to sign a noncompete agreement preventing

Mona Smith and a client in Smith’s office. “I could work 24/7,” she says, “but not finish the work, she says.”

Reporter Anita Abedian contributed to this article. Email: aba@alm.com.