

Lawyers Provide Pro Bono Assistance in Liberia

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Sponsored by Health Systems 20/20, several lawyers from Hogan Lovells have volunteered an estimated 450 hours per year to advise the Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW).

Bob Leibenluft and Philip Katz, both partners at Hogan Lovells, were contacted to counsel the MOHSW through the International Senior Lawyers Project (ISLP), a non-governmental organization that describes itself as "a vehicle through which senior lawyers can use their skills and expertise to promote the rule of law and human rights."

Health Systems 20/20 facilitated Hogan Lovells' participation in the ISLP by covering all non-labor costs for several senior legal advisors including Leibenluft and Katz, as well as junior legal volunteers.



Sought out for their expertise in health law, Leibenluft and Katz (pictured on the left with Minister of Health Walter Gwenigale, Junior Lawyer Carrie Stanley, and MOHSW General Council John Wilson) applied their experience working with U.S. government and private sector clients to provide pro bono

assistance to the MOHSW. Katz currently leads Hogan Lovells' pharmaceutical and biotechnology practice group where he advises companies, trade associations, and individuals in matters arising under regulation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and Leibenluft's practice is devoted entirely to health and antitrust matters, including counseling and litigation regarding antitrust issues in the health, medical device, and pharmaceutical industries.

As volunteers for the ISLP, Leibenluft and Katz enthusiastically pursued the challenge of advising a country that suffered two civil wars in the past 25 years and that had not seen significant changes to the public health law since 1976. "It was an opportunity to work with a country full of dedicated, hardworking individuals that really needed help," said Katz.

Working with four other lawyers from Hogan Lovells, Leibenluft and Katz helped the MOHSW establish an Office of General Counsel, and have been working closely with the Liberian lawyer who was hired for the position. In addition, the lawyers helped draft a recently-passed law creating the Liberian Medicines and Health Products Regulatory Agency (LMHRA), which is now responsible for regulating drug products, and will be developing regulations to implement the law.

Hogan Lovells is also assisting in drafting significant revisions to the country's public health law, in conjunction with the expected 2011 adoption of a new, ten-year National Health Plan, which is anticipated to call for broad changes in a number of areas, including health care financing, decentralization of government activities, and defining

basic health services for citizens.

What do changes to national health and pharmaceutical laws mean for the common Liberian? Leibenluft says the strengthened legal framework promotes the “rule of law,” providing consistent services regardless of changes in political leadership. As an example, Katz notes that the revised pharmaceutical law that created the LMHRA will give Liberians better access to essential medicines.

Leibenluft and Katz described their experience supporting the MOHSW as fulfilling and recommended the ISLP to other lawyers. “Our level of work in Liberia wouldn’t be possible without support from Health Systems 20/20,” said Katz.