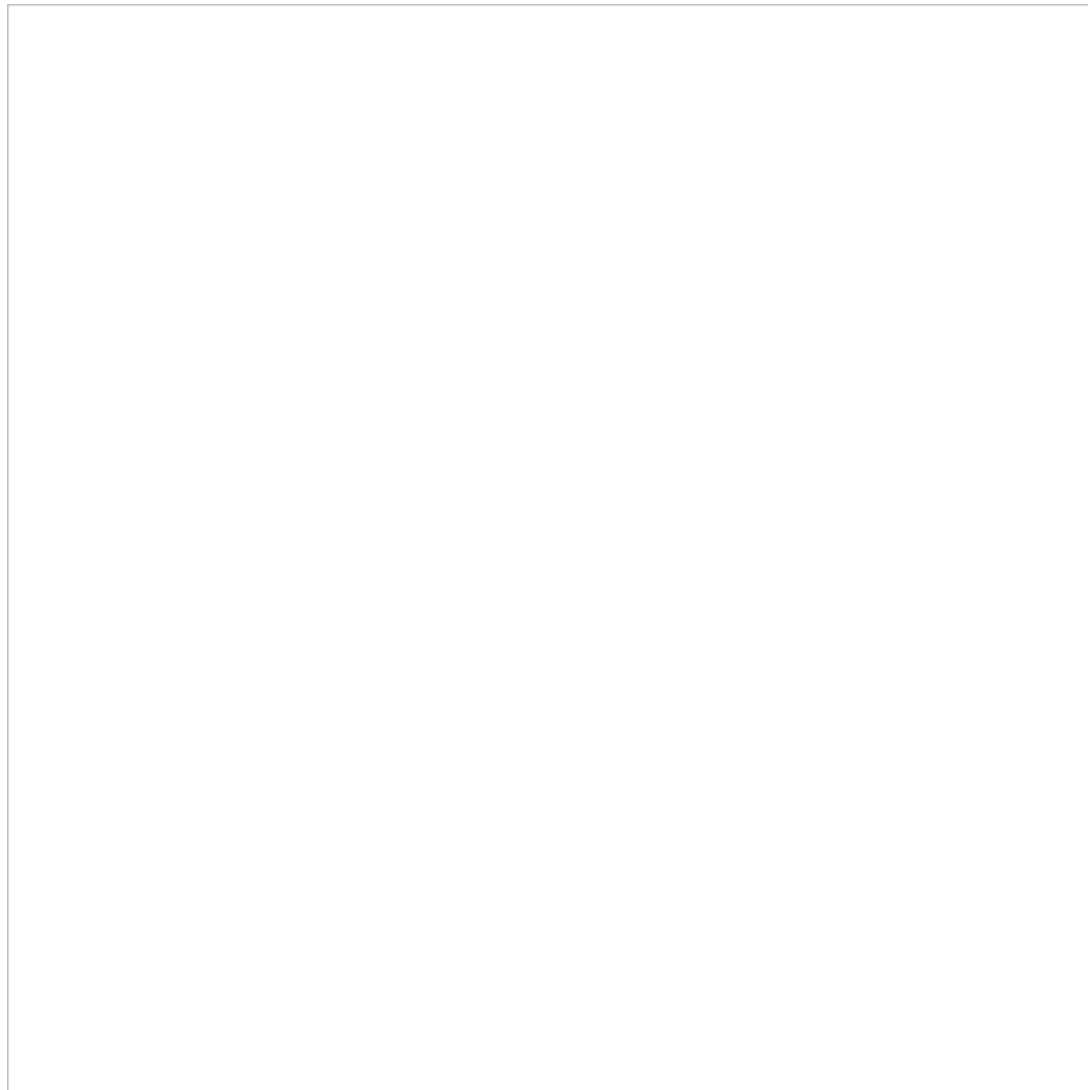

Associates Step Up to Support Community Initiative



Once a year, [Greater Boston Legal Services](#) (GBLS), a non-profit organization that provides free legal assistance to low-income families, asks Boston area associates to participate in the Associates Fund Drive, which draws contributions that support the work of GBLS attorneys in the Family Law Unit.

This year, more than ever, GBLS, which is funded primarily through IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts), is depending on contributions from the local legal community to support its programs. And associates in WilmerHale's Boston and Waltham offices are answering the call.

"This year, GBLS has a clear message," says transactional associate Stephen Ranere, who is co-chairing the firm's efforts with litigation associate Betsy Kent. "Because of the state of the economy, and the drop in interest rates, the amount of funding from IOLTA, the main lifeline of GBLS, has been decimated."

The Family Law Unit of GBLS assists families below 125 percent of the federal poverty line to escape domestic violence. According to the organization, there were 35 domestic violence-related deaths in the Greater Boston area last year. Due to a lack of funding, GBLS has been forced to select which women and families will receive the organization's services on the basis of who is more likely to be critically injured or murdered by their abuser. Ranere and Kent report that the lack of funding has left 50 percent of the individuals who turn to GBLS for help without legal aid, leaving families at risk.

"Funding from private sources such as the Associates Fund Drive is far more crucial this year than in past years," says Kent. "Contributions of any size will be acknowledged as important."

GBLS has asked participating associates to consider donating the equivalent of one billable hour, or the equivalent of one day's pay, to the drive.

To boost fundraising efforts, Ranere and Kent have assembled a team of associate floor captains to help spread the word, get fellow associates excited about the cause and collect contributions. And it seems there's an added benefit for volunteering as a floor captain. "Spreading the word about the drive gives newer associates a chance to meet others on their floor," says Ranere.

So far, Ranere and Kent report there has been an encouraging response to the fundraiser, which runs from April 13 to May 22.

Last year, WilmerHale was recognized by GBLS at the end of the 2008 drive for having the greatest increase in participation, and the chairs hope to achieve the same, if not better, results in 2009. This year, as in years past, the firm has pledged to match, dollar for dollar, the WilmerHale associates' contributions.