

# New York Law Journal



An **ALM** Publication

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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2011

## 9/11 AND THE LAW

The Impact on How Lawyers Do Business and Courts Dispense Justice



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**T**he New York County Lawyers' Association provides a unique perspective on how the events of 9/11 have affected the practice of law.

Located in the shadow of Ground Zero, NYCLA's landmark building on Vesey Street withstood the fury of the terrorist attacks. Since that fateful day 10 years ago, the Home of Law has undergone some needed renovations, but its foundation is as strong as ever. So too have NYCLA and its membership undergone some changes but their principles remain firmly in place.

Some of the changes wrought in the aftermath of 9/11 have been philosophical or attitudinal; others more practical. Borne of the days, weeks and months of work done on behalf of the victims and their survivors, we have seen a renewed desire among NYCLA members to provide pro bono legal services. New programs and forums designed to deal with the effects of disasters were created. We also have seen a need to be ever vigilant to protect the rights of

those unfairly targeted because of their ethnicity or religion.

Immediately after the attacks, NYCLA volunteers participated in the Death Certificate Project, assisting victims' survivors in preparing documents needed for the issuance of death certificates—work that entailed interviewing survivors and listening to stories of final goodbyes and painful last telephone calls.

Also, in cooperation with the New York State Bar Association and New York City Bar, NYCLA established an adopt-a-family program to aid the families of police officers, firefighters and others to provide pro bono estate and related legal services. This volunteer spirit continues today, as hundreds of NYCLA members provide pro bono legal services to those in need.

On the practical side, many attorneys and law firms were displaced and lost critical records in the attacks. Consequently, there has been an increased focus on disaster management and record storage in the profession. NYCLA has sponsored numerous CLEs on law-office technology and workshops to assist lawyers in rebuilding their practices.

As the first major bar association in the country to admit members without regard to race, ethnicity, religion or gender, NYCLA believes it must be ever vigilant to protect the rights of those unfairly targeted for their ethnicity or religion.

Upon witnessing these rights under attack, NYCLA responded by hosting programs and speaking out. For example, in 2002, an all-day seminar focused on the balance between legiti-

mate security concerns and civil liberties. Then, in 2004, a public forum addressed the impact the Patriot Act has had on the city's immigrants and minorities.

More recently, there has been opposition to the construction of an Islamic Community Center in NYCLA's neighborhood. I spoke out in favor of the center: "NYCLA was founded on a commitment to inclusion" and "welcomes the mosque to the neighborhood" as an addition that would make "the area around Ground Zero more vibrant" (NYLJ, Aug. 20, 2010).

On a personal note, I am gratified that my law firm, Arnold & Porter, is leading a pro bono effort to challenge a newly enacted zoning law in Bridgewater, N.J., designed to block the development of a mosque in that town. (Peter L. Zimroth, "The Case That Makes a Lawyer's Life Meaningful," NYLJ, Aug. 10, 2011).

The attacks on 9/11 have effected change in the legal profession and practice of law. They created many challenges that NYCLA and its members continue to face. However, they also have caused NYCLA and its members to step forward to protect the principles that NYCLA holds dear. ■