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Family law group, IBF partner to provide relief for lawyers

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Correction: This report originally stated the IBF was going to be participating in a similar event next month with a different partner organization. It is the AAML which will be holding another matching donation program in June.

The Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers announced a partnership with the Illinois Bar Foundation Monday to provide assistance to attorneys facing financial hardship during the pandemic.

In commemoration of Law Day on May 1, the academy is contributing up to \$5,000 in matching-grant donations to the IBF COVID-19 Lawyers Care Relief Fund. Throughout the month of May, donors to the foundation who contribute through the academy's website will have their donation matched by the organization.

"The academy had some excess money in the budget this year due to not being able to hold some of the activities we normally do," said IBF Board President and Academy Board of Directors member Lisa M. Nyuli, a partner at Ariano Hardy Ritt Nyuli Richmond Lytle & Goettel P.C. in South Elgin. "Rather than hang onto the money, we wanted to help where it's needed. We thought it would be a good idea to put out the matching grant challenge so lawyers who want to help support their colleagues can get more bang for their buck."

The fund was launched last May by the bar foundation to provide grants of up to \$2,000 to Illinois attorneys whose practices were hurt by the pandemic, whether due to illness or because of court closures.

During the summer of 2020, the foundation distributed one-time payments to 62 attorneys. There were no requirements for how attorneys spent the funds as long as they could prove financial need in their applications.

"We had a great response last year, and I don't expect we'll have less than a great response this time," Nyuli said.

She reported that many attorneys are still experiencing financial difficulties, especially attorneys that deal with small claims, evictions and foreclosure issues.

“What they can do is limited in scope right now, and a lot of those people are young attorneys who are just starting out,” Nyuli said. “There’s a lot of people who are still being affected by this.”

After the donation period, the bar foundation will open applications for the grants again on its website, though full guidelines for grant recipients have not yet been finalized.

In a statement released by the academy announcing the program, IBF Director of Events and Administration Jessie Reeves stated the program has a “ripple effect of aid to the community” since many of the attorneys who benefited from the program work with low-income clients and were able to be more flexible with collecting their own fees.

Nyuli noted that the AAML plans on holding a similar matching donation program with a second charity in June.

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