



STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN

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Wisconsin lawyers offer free legal advice to small businesses impacted by the pandemic

MADISON, WI – Small businesses in Wisconsin now have a place to go for free legal advice on issues they face due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a tough economy.

Starting Feb. 5, volunteer attorneys with the State Bar of Wisconsin Business Law Section will meet with small-business owners each Friday for an hourlong appointment, as part of the section's new [Small Business Assistance](#) project.

The project, implemented in collaboration with the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinics program, pairs volunteer attorneys and law students with pre-screened small-business owners who have legal questions related to their business.

The Small Business Assistance will support a wide-variety of small businesses, including those that provide business services; restaurants and bars; retail; health, beauty and fitness; automotive repair, travel and lodging; and recreation, according to Patricia J. Lane, section board member and organizer of the project. Lane is a partner with Foley & Lardner in Milwaukee.

How it Works

Wisconsin-licensed lawyers will offer free consultations, by Zoom or by phone, of up to one hour. If a business law issue cannot be adequately addressed during the session, the business person may be referred for an additional one-hour session at no charge. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Finance and lending
- Insurance claims/coverage
- Commercial leases and contracts
- Tax
- Labor and employment
- Real estate
- Commercial debtor/creditor
- Regulatory compliance, including privacy and COVID-19 related requirements

Exclusions: Litigation; entity selection and formation; patent, trademark, or other intellectual property issues; or commercial real estate transactions.

A Very Real Need

Small businesses account for 99.4% of all businesses in Wisconsin, and they employ nearly half the state's workforce. Lane recognized the need after hearing that business lawyers were receiving many questions from small-business owners on issues regarding compliance with COVID-19 governmental orders and whether

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force majeure clauses in contracts may be invoked to excuse performance, and governmental loan programs, including determining eligibility and compliance.

“Other owners needed assistance with business-interruption insurance claims and labor matters,” Lane said.

While the project currently offers an hour-long consultation for three businesses per week, additional consultations may be added in the future. “We will calibrate our future level of service to meet demand,” Lane said.

The project, she says, is expected to last indefinitely.

“One way we can help these business – and thereby the community at large – is to provide free legal advice. We hope this will increase the chances that a local business will be able to survive and thrive – thereby preserving jobs,” she said.

[Request an appointment today](#) for your free one-hour consultation.

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