

9 BigLaw Firms Pledge \$15M For Pro Bono Enviro Efforts

By **Keith Goldberg**

Law360 (September 14, 2018, 3:19 PM EDT) -- Nine BigLaw firms will provide a combined \$15 million in pro bono legal services to advance efforts to fight global climate change and bolster sustainability, California officials said Friday, the final day of a global climate summit in San Francisco.

Arnold & Porter, Cooley LLP, Dentons, Holland & Knight LLP, Latham & Watkins LLP, Morrison & Foerster LLP and Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC are each kicking in at least \$2 million worth of pro bono services to entrepreneurs and community-based nonprofits to pursue sustainability initiatives involving energy, transportation and land use by the end of 2020. Meanwhile, Hogan Lovells and WilmerHale are providing at least \$500,000 apiece by the end of 2020.

The firms are founding members of the Lawyers for a Sustainable Economy initiative, unveiled on the final day of the Global Climate Action Summit hosted by California.

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said the firms will be a powerful ally for organizations pushing for climate change and sustainability solutions both in the Golden State and throughout the U.S.

"They will have some of the best litigators at their side, if not in front leading the way, as they make their case," Becerra said on a Friday conference call with reporters from the summit. "It will ensure a spirit of innovation and collaboration, that we see today at the climate summit, moves forward."

Officials say the firms' pro bono work will cover a range of legal services, from incorporation and corporate governance, to contracts and structuring advice for finance and investment, real estate, intellectual property and tax issues, as well as regulatory work and litigation.

Groups that could qualify for pro bono services include nonprofits serving marginalized or disenfranchised groups or groups championing civil rights with an environmental justice component, officials said. That could range from developing community solar projects for public housing residents or public advocacy for increased energy efficiency, they said.

Newly formed for-profit companies founded by low-income entrepreneurs could also be candidates for pro bono services. Suz Mac Cormac, who chairs Morrison & Foerster's social enterprise and impact investing group and co-chairs the firm's energy and clean technology group, said one area of real opportunity is connecting nonprofit organizations with mainstream, private financing sources to advance sustainability initiatives.

"That is a particular area where firms like MoFo have expertise, and we're excited about it," Mac Cormac said Friday.

As for pro bono litigation services, pursuing lawsuits against energy companies isn't one of those purposes, according to David Hayes, the executive director of the State Energy and Environmental Impact Center at the New York University School of Law, which will work with Stanford Law School and Stanford's Precourt Institute for Energy to help connect the firms with potential pro bono recipients.

"These are large law firms that are committed to sustainability writ large," said Hayes, a former deputy interior secretary in the Clinton and Obama administrations and the former global chair of Latham's environment, land and resources practice. "This is not just about climate. These law firms represent the fact there is a nonpartisan middle here to help communities address the needs they have and bring new solutions to our most challenging problems."

Hayes said the Lawyers for a Sustainable Economy program is banking on additional law firms climbing aboard.

--Editing by Orlando Lorenzo.