

**Project Announcement:**  
**9/11 SMALL BUSINESS COURT ASSISTANCE PROJECT**

Thousands of small businesses below in lower Manhattan were physically damaged, lost access, or were otherwise fundamentally disrupted by the events of September 11th. As a result, small business owners have suffered, and continue to suffer, severe economic injury. Indeed, many businesses, particularly in and around Ground Zero and the Frozen Zone, have yet to re-open. One result is that many have fallen behind on rent, leading landlords to commence commercial non-payment or holdover eviction proceedings in the Housing Part of the Civil Court of the City of New York, which has jurisdiction over these matters.

The Honorable Fern Fisher, Administrative Judge of the Civil Court, working with the Legal Aid Society, the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, Stroock & Stroock & Lavan and Latham & Watkins, has overseen the creation of the 9/11 Small Business Court Assistance Project to address these unprecedented circumstances. The mission of the Project is to transform eviction proceedings into opportunities to explore mutually beneficial resolutions, avert business dislocation, and contribute to resurgence of the downtown areas affected by the WTC tragedy.

The City of New York, through the Economic Development Corporation, fully supports the 9/11 Small Business Court Assistance Project. It is expected that mediation combined with experienced advocacy, with the full support of the Court, will create a problem-solving forum that will benefit both tenant and owner alike, including by finding solutions that will keep office space in lower Manhattan occupied and generating rent.

The Project, which establishes a Special Calendar to hear these cases, is set to begin at the Manhattan Civil Court on June 4, 2002. The Special Calendar will feature intensive mediation services to facilitate settlement, lead by experienced mediators from Safe Horizons, the Dispute Resolution Program of the Civil Court, and JAMS. Small businesses that do not already have lawyers will be provided with pro bono counsel from law firms, the Civil Court and Legal Aid pro bono panels, and through the cooperation of the City Bar, the New York County Lawyers Association and the New York State Bar Association. As it has done for September 11th legal relief work citywide, the City Bar will coordinate the matching of volunteer attorneys with pro se parties. The Project will recruit practitioners already familiar with Housing Court and commercial lease litigation and negotiation. Through its Community Law Offices, the Legal Aid Society will play a coordinating role by contributing an experienced full-time lawyer both to handle matters directly (particularly small proprietors appearing *pro se*) and to be present in the courthouse to support pro bono counsel and the mediators.

All mediation and legal services will be rendered without charge in an effort to aid in the recovery of lower Manhattan. Orientations for participating mediators and pro bono counsel will be conducted at the Manhattan Civil Court at 111 Centre Street on May 16th, at 1:00 pm and again at 5:30 pm. The orientation will focus on the purpose of the Project, the operation of the Special Calendar, the mediation process, and the financial and other resources for small businesses affected by the WTC attack.

The 9/11 Small Business Government Assistance Project is an innovative solution to the tenacious legal problems caused by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It demonstrates the continuing resourcefulness of the bar in rising to this challenge. Counsel interested in volunteering for the Project should contact the City Bar at 382-4763.