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METRO

## Hero of the Day: NYC lawyer offers pro bono legal help amid coronavirus crisis

By Ruth Weissmann

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Akiva Cohen

Courthouses are empty and proceedings delayed as the city battles the coronavirus, but Manhattan lawyer Akiva Cohen is still taking on new clients, offering free legal aid to those affected by the crisis — even as he battles the bug himself.

“I knew my business was going to be slowing down anyway, so I was going to have time on my hands,” the 41-year-old lawyer told *The Post* as he nursed a mild case of COVID-19.

“Times like this, everybody’s got to do what they can to help each other out. That’s really all we can do, is take care of each other.”

Cohen, a commercial litigator and intellectual property attorney, [posted on Twitter](#) on March 22 offering to help anyone with coronavirus-fueled legal issues, all pro bono.

“[New York] people—these are insane, trying times. If you need any legal help trying to deal with the impact of Coronavirus on your life or business, reach out. No charge,” he wrote.

Since then, the Long Island resident said he's been flooded with a "crazy" level of notifications, and has begun fielding comments and messages from people in need of legal help.

"I'm just trying to get to as many as I can get to," he said.

The altruistic attorney has been tackling issues from small business struggles to paperwork problems, something he says could be handled virtually.

"The very first real substantive response that I got a couple weeks ago was from people who were like look...we want to do healthcare proxies, but we're in quarantine and can't have witnesses because nobody can come in and witness it, what do we do?"

"These questions are not really questions that come up all that often in normal times," explained Cohen, who helped the pair navigate finding a witness while staying socially distanced.

Most of the responses have come from freelancers frantic over unpaid invoices, Cohen told The Post.

"It's mostly been, 'Hey, people aren't paying me,'" he said.

"You've got people who need to be paid but you also have people who, for legitimate business reasons, may not have the money. So you've got to try and walk that line of, let's figure out what we can do here that is survivable for all of us. Because the point is, we're all trying to survive this together."

"When you're talking about one of these mom-and-pop shops, you don't want to be bringing out the bazookas and destroying their business," he added.

The lawyer told The Post that his assistance "adds a little bit of weight" to virus-related conflicts—but for questions outside his expertise, he has no objection to calling in colleagues.

"Other attorneys have, when they saw my tweet, chimed in and said, you know what, I'd be happy to help with this if you could use the help. People are really stepping up all over the place," he said.

"It's good to have sort of a network of specialists that you can look to to help you answer these types of questions, and most people don't. And that's what I'm trying to offer people."

His new clients have been grateful to get the legal assistance while the jury's out, but Cohen brushes off the praise.

"People that I've helped and people that are just seeing this happen are like, 'Oh my god, you're amazing.' ... No, this is basic living-in-a-society stuff. I have the ability to help, I can do it without harming myself and my family — that's my job."

The veteran litigator told The Post he was especially inspired to lend a hand by family members on the front lines of the pandemic.

"My wife is a nurse, she works with chemotherapy patients. She saves lives. My mom's a nurse, I've got other relatives who are front line fighting this off. If I can use this to do some level of good, that's wonderful. I'm gonna have the time, I may as well put it to good use."

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