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## The Boston Bar Association's Marathon Assistance Project: One Year Later

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### Viewpoint

Nearly one year ago, the Boston Bar Association (BBA) launched its Marathon Assistance Project to match volunteer lawyers with clients facing a range of legal issues created by the April 15, 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. Some lawyers volunteered to represent individual victims of the bombings. Others volunteered to assist small, independent businesses affected by the bombings. Through the Marathon Assistance Project, the BBA responded to 100% of the requests for assistance from the community.

In response to the BBA's request for volunteers, we signed up to help two individuals injured by the bombings prepare their submissions to the One Fund. We met with our clients, gathered medical records and information, requested additional information from hospitals when necessary, wrote clear descriptions of the injuries sustained, and, for one client, appeared for an in-person interview with the One Fund.

One of our clients, a Marathon spectator, was standing on Boylston Street outside of a restaurant just yards away from the second blast. She was wounded by shrapnel and sent by ambulance to a nearby hospital, where doctors told her that an X-ray indicated that her injuries did not warrant overnight hospitalization. Despite her return home that same day, her troubles were not over; in the next few weeks, she experienced persistent ankle pain, concussive-like symptoms, hearing loss, and pain. A

subsequent MRI revealed that two pieces of shrapnel were still lodged in her ankle, and doctors also determined that she had experienced a concussion and sustained inner ear damage. The injuries left her in a leg cast and using crutches for several months following the bombings, and today she still has difficulty with such simple matters as descending stairs or standing for a length of time.

Our other client was standing approximately 15 yards from one of the blasts. Immediately following the explosion, he suffered significant and persistent hearing problems. In the days and weeks after the bombings, he sought medical attention and was treated for his continued tinnitus.

Although both of our clients received a distribution from the One Fund in 2013, they continue to live with the impact of their experiences on Boylston Street one year ago. The charitable contribution, while deeply appreciated and helpful, did not represent the end of their Marathon bombing experience.

For our part, we learned that there very much was a need, and place, for volunteer lawyer advocates in the aftermath of the Marathon bombings. Certainly, the One Fund's claims process was designed to be navigable by a layperson, and it was possible for victims to make successful claims without assistance. Still, that process involved gathering documents, drafting a persuasive explanation of the injuries sustained, and getting the submission notarized — a practical problem, especially for someone who was immobile. All of those requirements came at a time when individual victims were rightly focused on their recoveries, both physical and emotional. BBA volunteers were able to take on this work for their clients, reducing the burden on people who, at that time, already had significant new challenges to address.

From our perspective, the BBA's Marathon Assistance Project was valuable for another reason, which had less to do with the need for legal expertise. People injured in the bombings, and their families, experienced a shocking and tragic event. In our meetings with them, we sensed that, separate and apart from the usefulness of legal help, they appreciated the simple fact that an established Boston institution, and individuals associated with it, were listening to and supporting them. It seemed that the mere existence of the project sent, and was gratefully received as, a powerful signal that affected individuals were part of a community that intended to embrace and assist them. This message was reinforced by the fact that the BBA's effort was one part of a constellation of other community contributions — including similar initiatives from other legal groups, monetary donations from across the globe (more than 195,000 individuals donated to the One Fund alone), and the unparalleled dedication and sacrifice shown by Boston medical professionals and first responders.

For these reasons, we are grateful to have been able to play a small part in the BBA's Marathon Assistance Project, and to work with other attorneys who volunteered through that project, or otherwise, to address challenges created as a result of the bombings. Some of those experiences are detailed in the following articles. Shannon Capone Kirk represented a woman who was standing on Boylston Street and suffered significant hearing loss as a result of the bombings. Jon Cowen and Rosanna Sattler represented several small businesses in the area around the Marathon finish line that were forced to close for 10 days while the crime scene was processed. Sue Abbott and Lisa McChesney explain how they worked with the City of Boston to establish the One Fund and obtain expedited tax-exempt status from the IRS, a process that typically takes up to 18 months but which they accomplished in just one month. The experiences of those volunteer lawyers — a small subset of the BBA members who volunteered — are told in the following articles.

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