

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 156, No. 31

Tuesday, February 16, 2010

Kirkland lawyer wants a system that helps Haitian orphans

By Jerry Crimmins
Law Bulletin staff writer

Kirkland & Ellis LLP lawyers are working “with a sense of urgency” to try to establish a system by which Americans may adopt Haitian orphans, according to a partner at the firm.

The “formalized, expedited adoption process for pre-earthquake orphans who are now homeless or otherwise living in dire conditions” is planned as one that would be acceptable to the government of Haiti and to U.S. federal and state governments.

“I’m hopeful and confident we can get something done” and quickly, said Christopher J. Greeno, a partner in Kirkland’s Chicago office who focuses on private equity deals.

Greeno, 36, has a close relationship through his church with Grace House of Hope orphanages in Haiti. He has also done pro bono legal work for Marie Major, who runs Grace House of Hope.

In the January earthquake, which Greeno said profoundly affected him, the Grace House of Hope for Girls collapsed and has since been demolished.

Since then, the 30 girls, ages 2 to 15, at the Grace House of Hope for Girls have been living outdoors, Greeno said.

Grace House of Hope also supervises a second orphanage called Coenha, which survived the earthquake. But the 35 children at the second orphanage are also living outdoors as Haitians are afraid of further earthquake aftershocks, Greeno said.

Greeno said he and two other partners at Kirkland & Ellis, Eugene F. Assaf and Philippa Scarlett in the Washington, D.C., office, have launched a pro bono project to establish a formalized adoption process so Haiti orphans “could be joined with loving, permanent families here in the U.S.”

Assaf and Scarlett are both litigation partners.

Their pro bono project is intended to benefit children who were living in orphanages prior to the earthquake, Greeno said, whose orphanages may have been destroyed so that the children have no shelter and sometimes little or no food.

Greeno said he is aware of 10 U.S. Baptists who were arrested in Haiti for trying to take 33 children out of that island



Christopher J. Greeno is seen here last June in Haiti with orphan girls from the Grace House of Hope for Girls.

nation after the earthquake, allegedly without permission.

He said the project he and the other two Kirkland partners are working on is intended to create a legal process so “people know what rules they are supposed to follow” to adopt Haitian orphans.

He hopes those rules will be approved by the Haitian government and U.S. federal and state governments. “When a child is adopted, the local state government has the authority” in the U.S., Greeno said.

Greeno said he believes the Haitian government will cooperate. Even though “we are just getting started, we’ve received tremendous offers of support from a wide range of people here, including contacts in the U.S. government.”

Regarding the 10 Baptists who got arrested, “I have to believe they had every good intention,” Greeno said.

“Unfortunately, it’s just a time of great confusion and chaos.” That is why, he said, Kirkland & Ellis wants to create “a formal process with which everyone is comfortable.”

Greeno is also heavily involved with fund raising for Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake. He said the law firm, his fellow employees at the law firm, and his law clients have so far contributed more than \$400,000.

Greeno, a graduate of Northwestern University School of Law, has been with Kirkland for 12 years — since he got his law degree.

Kirkland’s Web site shows an impressive list of multi-million dollar private equity deals that Greeno has been involved in.

He is also a member of the Wheatland Salem Church in Naperville, part of the United Methodist Church, and he is on the Mission Leadership Committee at the church.

Through his church and another Naperville organization, Impact for Jesus, he previously has visited the church’s mission in India.

He said he went to Haiti last June when Marie Major, of Grace House of Hope, who is now

continued...

73, asked him to help her set up a legal succession mechanism for the assets of the orphanages.

Grace House of Hope also operates a day school for more than 200 children who are not orphans. Those children in the day school are also fed by the school, and the school is sometimes their only source of food, Greeno said.

"I have to say that when I went to Haiti, it was a whole different level of poverty, and it was just so pervasive throughout the country. It is truly overwhelming at times."

Greeno and his family sponsor three children in that school: Melissa, age 8; Mordechai, age 5; and Daifur, age 10. The sponsorship enables them to go to the school and eat there, he said.

In the earthquake, he said, the girls were asleep in bedrooms on the second floor of the orphanage. The first floor collapsed with the walls going inward, but the second floor fell down intact.

Major and other workers got all the girls out safely, he said.

Of the children in the day school, one child was killed in his own home and others suffered minor injuries.

Greeno said after his wife told him about the earthquake, he spent hours trying to contact Major or anyone at the orphanage, and he said his church was doing the same.

"Some time late in the evening, after a lot of prayer ... I felt what I really needed to do was sit down and write a letter to friends and family, partners at Kirkland and clients, to let them know about the situation of the earthquake and my personal friendships in Haiti."

He stayed up all night writing the letter and has since stayed up several other nights on related work.

Greeno made light of his own efforts compared to volunteers actually in Haiti. "I am very thankful the Lord has given me this opportunity to play a part in the relief efforts."

He said he wrote the letter "and after that, the Good Lord took over and He's done some amazing things."

Since the earthquake, 600 individuals at

Kirkland & Ellis have donated \$155,000 to relief efforts, and the Kirkland & Ellis Foundation matched those donations with another \$155,000, Greeno said, for a total of \$310,000.

They distributed 75 percent to the Red Cross and 25 per cent to Grace House of Hope.

"In addition," he said, "my clients, family and friends, including Code, Hennessy & Simmons; GTCR Golder Rauner; Madison Dearborn Partners; Oaktree Capital Management; Goldman Sachs; Morgan Stanley," and also the Women's Bar Association of D.C., have committed an additional \$100,000 for the benefit of the Grace House of Hope orphanages and school.

As a result, the orphans are being fed and the orphanage will be rebuilt, he said.

Those who wish to contribute can contact Greeno at Kirkland & Ellis. The law firm also has a separate clothing and food drive.