

Shook Lures Big Pro Bono Fish to Deepen the Firm's National Efforts

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By Bruce Love
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What You Need to Know

- Shook has hired Manatt's pro bono director Scot Fishman.
- Am Law 200 firm Shook is looking to further strengthen and coordinate its national pro bono program across its 17 offices.
- In his first year at Manatt, Fishman's efforts led to a 33% increase in average hours and over 61% rise in participation.

After eight years and a stellar track record boosting pro bono participation and results at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, Scot Fishman is heading to Shook, Hardy & Bacon to direct the firm's pro bono programs.

In his first year as pro bono director at Manatt, Fishman's efforts led to a 33% increase in average hours and over 61% rise in participation. At no time before the pandemic did Manatt's rank fall below 35th in the Am Law 200 Pro Bono Scorecard, and in 2019 it reached an all-time firm record of 23rd.

Fishman began his legal career in corporate litigation in 2003, predominantly representing energy companies at LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae before a merger with Dewey Ballantine created Dewey & LeBoeuf, where he was director of pro bono for six years

until joining Manatt. But prior to his legal career, Fishman was a teacher in the impoverished Trinidad neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

“When I went to the law, I promised my students I would try to do something that served communities like theirs,”

Fishman said in an interview with The National Law Journal.

Now at Shook, where he landed Aug. 2, Fishman said he is “excited” to work in a firm that is “around 90%” litigators. “That, my friend, is what you call a pro bono director's, dream,” he said, because trial and advocacy skills are crucial to helping underserved communities in the broad range of challenges they face.

Fishman left Manatt on Feb. 11 for an extended break.

Shook, said firm chair Madeleine McDonough, provides corporate and other legal services but is most known for complex litigation—particularly commercial, products liability, IP and environmental. She



Scot Fishman, partner at Shook, Hardy & Bacon.

Courtesy photos

agrees that the pro bono world is often hungry to find excellent litigators to take on important matters.

“As well as the broad range of pro bono needs beyond litigation, we do a lot of larger-scale, more complex litigation in the pro bono space,” McDonough said. “We’re uniquely suited to do these matters because of our background.”

Fishman characterizes Shook as a firm that already has a strong track record in pro bono, and says his goal will be to engage with firm lawyers in areas of service that interest the individuals at the firm.

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Engagement, Fishman said, is the most important tool in the pro bono professional’s toolbox.

“You have to have relationships with every single lawyer in the firm and can’t just be some guy sitting in an office in D.C., throwing out emails and hoping people say yes,” he said.

Fishman, who for the past few years has been splitting his time between New York and Los Angeles, will return to Washington and be based out of Shook’s D.C. offices.

Top of Fishman’s priorities at Shook will be working to strengthen and build relationships with Civil Rights and Legal Aid organizations.

“They are the leaders in these fights. They are on the front lines all over the country with very limited budgets and overworked staffs,” he said. “The role of private practice lawyers is to support these organizations, learn from them and work with them to forward the work they are doing.”

While his own pro bono efforts tend toward foster adoptions, immigration, transgender name changes, tenant and veterans’ issues, and death penalty and prisoner rights cases, Fishman says his role at Shook will be as a conduit for the firm’s lawyers to find and work on causes that personally matter to them.

McDonough said Fishman has genuine interest and expertise in connecting across a firm’s business and partnering with clients on some of their pro bono efforts and desires.

“We’ve always done that, but I think Scot will help us there,” said McDonough.

McDonough and Fishman also share a belief that data and leveraging information firmwide is important for a successful pro bono program.

“Scot is very focused on metrics and data, and I am too,” McDonough said. “You advance your pro bono efforts across the firm by establishing a baseline of information and then growing and developing it. Scot will bring a lot of structure and rigor to the program.”

Since its previous pro bono director, Jolie Justus, moved in-house as general counsel of Truman Medical Centers in March 2020, Shook has designated a lawyer in each of its 17 offices as a pro bono advocate to help keep pro bono work coordinated and running smoothly at the firm. It also took its time finding and screening a replacement.

“We wanted to get this right,” McDonough said, adding Shook has had “an embarrassment of wonderful” candidates. “I viewed it as an opportunity to really invest in that position and make sure that we were advancing things as much as we could.”