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## **Client Alert**

### **Plews Shadley Racher & Braun LLP Participates in the First Delegation to Visit and Support the Legal Aid Centre of Eldoret, Kenya (“LACE”)**

*By: Theresa Willard and Donna Marron*

PSRB attorneys Theresa Willard and Donna Marron traveled to Kenya recently as part of the first delegation of attorneys to visit and support the Legal Aid Centre of Eldoret (LACE). LACE is a clinic offering free legal services to Kenyans infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. The delegation, led by Indiana Court of Appeals Judge Patricia Riley and Indiana University School of Law-Indianapolis Dean Gary Roberts, is working to establish and strengthen an Indiana-Kenya partnership that, through LACE, promotes greater access to justice for some of Kenya’s most vulnerable citizens.

LACE works closely with the Nobel Prize-nominated AMPATH (formerly the Academic Model for the Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS, now the Academic Model Providing Access to Health). Just as AMPATH is a partnership between the physicians and medical schools of Indiana and Eldoret, so LACE is a budding partnership between the attorneys and law schools of the two communities. PSRB was the only law firm to send lawyers on this first delegation trip.

While in Kenya, the delegation members met with LACE clients and spoke with them about the circumstances that brought them to the clinic. One such client is a twenty two year old woman named Joy\*. Joy was raped by her uncle, who was HIV positive. Because of the assault, Joy became pregnant. She also contracted HIV. It is not uncommon in Kenya for such crimes to go unprosecuted. But because of LACE, Joy’s case is being heard and the man who attacked and infected her is now in prison awaiting trial.

Another client is a young woman named Elizabeth\*. Elizabeth’s husband died of AIDS when Elizabeth was pregnant with the couple’s sixth child. When the husband died, his family forced Elizabeth and the children to leave the marital home. In addition to leaving the family homeless, the eviction deprived Elizabeth and the children of the crops on their land and the means of providing their food. This is an all too common fate for widows in Kenyan villages. Because of LACE, however, Elizabeth had an advocate to intervene on her family’s behalf. LACE attorneys opened negotiations with the chief in Elizabeth’s village, seeking either the return of her home and land or compensation from her husband’s family. Her case is still in progress, but Elizabeth now has hope that she and her children, including baby Jessica\*, will survive.

\*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the clients and their families.

These stories are typical of the challenges faced by the HIV/AIDS affected population of Kenya. The stigma attached to the dreaded disease combines with poverty and lack of education to deprive many Kenyans of basic human rights. Legal issues such as succession, maintenance, child support, domestic violence, discrimination, and criminal attacks are commonly brought to LACE for resolution. LACE gives its clients a voice, and a place at the table – or the court – where decisions that affect their most basic needs are made.

The LACE staff presently consists of one full time lawyer, a law clerk and an office assistant. The judiciary, bar and Moi University School of Law are all represented on the Eldoret Board of Directors for LACE. With further support from PSRB and others in the Indianapolis legal community, more professionals can be hired and more legal services provided. In an environment where significant legal rights exist but often are not enforced or even generally known, every success is a victory not only for the client involved but also to others who are similarly situated. LACE hopes to positively impact the legal system in addition to helping individual clients.

LACE and AMPATH are groundbreaking efforts that embody the best of Hoosier values and dreams. Both represent professional collaborations between Kenyans and Americans. Although the settings for legal representation and medical treatment in western Kenya are radically different from those in Indianapolis, the goals of lawyers and doctors in both places – to promote justice and to heal – are identical. The connection between the Kenyan lawyers, judges and academics who graciously received and met with the members of the first Indiana delegation of lawyers to travel to western Kenya to visit and support LACE was immediate and real.

PSRB is proud to support LACE's efforts to empower some of the world's most powerless people. We commend the vision and initiative of the judicial, academic and private sector participants in Indiana and Kenya who make this extraordinary project possible.