



Illinois Heartland Library System

MEMO TO: IHLS Board of Directors
FROM: Leslie M. Bednar
DATE: November 19, 2024
RE: Legal Support for IHLS

Illinois Heartland Library System employs a conservative approach to seeking legal counsel. We seek assistance in matters of legal jeopardy for the organization (generally related to human resources), regarding a challenge to meeting procedures such as the Open Meetings Act, or legal concerns regarding a member library. Our annual operating budget includes the anticipated annual need for professional services such as accounting and legal assistance. The budget is approved by the Board of Directors each May, and staff are responsible for responsible use of budget categories.

We have longstanding relationships with two attorneys licensed to practice in Illinois. They practice general, library, and human resources law:

- Karen E. Milner is a partner of FordHarrison LLC. She has offices in Chicago, IL, and St. Louis, MO. She represents management in matters and disputes related to employment law and labor relations. IHLS has been working with Karen for over 10 years. One of her former partners, R. Michael Lowenbaum, originally represented IHLS regarding a legacy collective bargaining unit in 2012. Ms. Milner's current hourly rate is \$495.00.
- Phillip Lenzini is general counsel with Heyl Royster. He has an office in Peoria, IL, and practices municipal law and library law. Formerly of the firm Kavanagh, Scully, Sudow, White & Frederick, P.C., he has decades of experience representing libraries in the state, particularly those in central and southern Illinois. He has represented IHLS since our merger year (2010). Mr. Lenzini's current hourly rate is \$200.00.

There are several advantages to retaining counsel for a long period of time, and both individuals are considered experts in their fields of law:

- Counsel has extensive historical knowledge of our organization. Bringing a new firm on board would require extensive background information to explain our past legal situations that have set precedence. This would be an additional cost in terms of legal fees and staff time to prepare materials and work through matters with counsel until we reach a satisfying conclusion for the agency.
- IHLS and its member libraries have benefitted from pro bono work through our legal counsel.
- Both barristers are very responsive to our requests. Timeliness is key to protecting our organization and aiding our members.

IMAGINING TOMORROW ~ DELIVERING POSSIBILITIES TODAY!

- We receive updated legal information from a state and national perspective regarding legislation that will directly impact IHLS based on the size of the law firm. Ford Harrison also offers free webinars to learn the legalities of new updates and explains them clearly.
- Years of partnership with counsel have engendered mutual trust and respect.

IHLS turns to legal counsel only when we have exhausted all available resources. As a publicly funded agency, our IHLS team takes our responsibilities seriously. We are thoughtful and efficient stewards of public funds, and this extends to our strategic decisions when working within the bounds of an approved budget.

Thank you for your interest in our legal counsel philosophy.