

MANAGING YOUR MONEY

Employers' Group Plans: An Affordable Way To Obtain Legal Advice

(NAPSA)—The turbulent and difficult market environment continues to affect nearly all aspects of the economy, including the housing sector. The fallout from the current subprime mortgage crisis is still being felt by homeowners across the United States, and many of those who faced financial challenges before the economic downturn may be feeling the pinch now more than ever. Unfortunately, the crisis is far from over; large numbers of homeowners still carry mortgages they can't afford and face declining home values and possible foreclosure.

As the number of foreclosures continues to rise, so too does the number of homeowners who are in need of legal assistance as they attempt to save their homes. Many may even owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth. Most don't know who to turn to for help and are struggling to find solutions. For these individuals, the best answer may be to turn to an attorney who can help them understand their mortgage agreement and provide helpful guidance in difficult mortgage situations. But while individuals facing debt and credit problems are often the ones who need an attorney most, they're also the least likely to be able to afford one.

For those who find themselves struggling with financial challenges but are unable to afford an attorney to help save their home, there is a silver lining: group legal plans offered through their employers. A group legal plan is a voluntary benefit, which means that employees pay 100 percent of the cost but have access to institutionally priced products. This gives employees and their families access to affordable, local attor-

Group Legal Plans

- Employees pay 100 percent of the cost.
- Provides access to attorneys for advice, consultations and frequently needed personal legal matters.
- Usage for debt collection defense increased 27 percent from 2007 to 2008.
- Usage for review and preparation of loan documents and deeds increased 50 percent from 2007 to 2008.
- Employees can meet with attorneys in person or conduct business over the phone, through the mail or via e-mail.
- 33 percent of large employers and nearly 150 of the Fortune 500® companies offer a group legal plan.



neys for advice and consultations, as well as services for the most frequently needed personal legal matters. Generally, employees elect the legal plan during their annual benefits enrollment and pay around \$15 to \$20 per month through payroll deductions.

Statistics from Hyatt Legal Plans, Inc., a subsidiary of MetLife® and the largest group legal plan provider in the U.S., show that homeowners who are faced with financial trouble are using their legal plans proactively to help them avoid bankruptcy and foreclosure. Usage among Hyatt's legal plan members for debt collection defense increased 27 percent from 2007 to 2008. Debt collection defense includes attorney assistance with services such as negotiating with creditors, establishing adjusted repayment plans and defending plan members against foreclosure.

The use of Hyatt's mortgage-related services, including review and preparation of loan docu-

ments and deeds, has also increased—up 50 percent from 2007 to 2008. This indicates that legal plan members are heeding the warnings of others who have fallen victim to predatory lending and unfavorable mortgage terms, and are asking their plan attorneys to review their mortgage documents, deeds and other paperwork before signing on the dotted line when purchasing a home.

The increased use of group legal plans by Hyatt Legal Plans for mortgages and foreclosure defense underscores the tremendous value that employees are finding in their group legal plans. A participant of the group legal plan seeking assistance has the convenience of meeting with a local attorney in person or conducting business over the phone, through the mail or via e-mail. Many participants of the group legal plan also appreciate the convenience of payroll deductions and the affordability of a group legal plan. Participants pay no additional attorney fees beyond their monthly premium for matters covered by the legal plan.

In times of economic crisis, employers can help employees manage their individual financial situations by offering group legal plans to employees. According to the Society for Human Resource Management's 2008 Employee Benefits Survey report, 33 percent of large employers offer a group legal plan. Nearly 150 of the FORTUNE 500® companies offer a group legal plan. And Hyatt Legal Plan's voluntary enrollment business is growing by more than 20 percent annually, pointing to the overall value that employees find in group legal plans—particularly in times of economic distress.