

Opinions + Editorial Editorials

Stop ambulance-chasing lawyers

Lawyers do a lot of good. They help and advocate for people who have been injured and wronged. But some lawyers aren't doing anyone but themselves any good.

These are the ambulance chasers who, as a result of their unscrupulous, overreaching schemes for soliciting business, are doing harm to accident victims and bringing the rest of Michigan's legal profession into disrepute.

This is a large and growing problem in Michigan. The number of lawyers who are attempting to solicit business from auto accident victims when they are at their most vulnerable, in the immediate aftermath of a tragic crash, is growing. There are now nearly a dozen law firms in Michigan that are sending brochures with police reports, and in some cases, hiring chiropractors and proxy groups to contact these accident victims by phone. In some cases, these proxies are ringing doorbells and knocking on doors.

This is terribly demeaning to the legal profession. This type of ambulance chasing needs to be stopped now.

For those reasons, I strongly support the two bills recently introduced in the Michigan House of Representatives by Rep. Ellen Cogen Lipton, D-Huntington Woods, and Rep. Joseph Graves, R-Argentine Township.

Together, the bills would stop lawyers from purchasing and downloading police reports and then contacting these accident victims.

There is an ethical rule that in theory prohibits solicitation already in Michigan. But it has a loophole in it that a growing number of law firms are now exploiting. By sending the police report, along with the package of glossy promotional materials about the lawyer and his law firm to a person's home, a lawyer can get around this ethical ban on solicitation. The other way around it is to hire someone else to do it for you. There are a growing number of lawyers who are hiring other non-lawyers to do the soliciting for them, even going so far as to call people who've just been injured in a car accident on the phone, and knock on the door.

It's time to stop this. Under Rep. Lipton's House Bill 4770, during the first 30 days after an auto accident, lawyers would be prohibited from accessing the police reports which contain the information that ambulance-chasing lawyers use to harass and solicit unsuspecting auto accident victims.

Significantly, lawyers who violate the prohibition would be guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment for up to two years or a fine of up to \$15,000, or both.

Under Rep. Graves's [House Bill 4771](#), attorneys would be prohibited from intentionally contacting a personal injury victim or family member of that victim with a direct solicitation to provide legal services until 30 days after the event that caused the personal injury.

Violation of this proposed law would result in a misdemeanor conviction punishable by a fine of up to \$15,000 for the first violation and up to \$30,000 for a second or subsequent violation. The court may also order the convicted individual to pay the prosecution costs.

I believe these bills provide important ways to protect both the public and the legal profession from the abhorrent practice of ambulance chasing.

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