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### Development group seeks virus liability shield for employers

By DAVID WINZELBERG

The Association for a Better Long Island sent a letter to U.S. congressional leaders urging them to pass legislation that protects employers from lawsuits by their workers or customers sickened by COVID-19 at businesses.

Kyle Strober, ABLI's executive director, said that regardless of how stringent a business follows disinfecting protocols established by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, tests its employees, and monitors those who enter and exit its premises, it will be impossible to completely eliminate the threat of infection. ABLI maintains that unless Congress acts, business owners will be liable from employee, visitor, and/or customer lawsuits should they contract the virus.

"We believe the business 'liability shield' may ultimately be a key determining factor in how, or even whether, America's economy begins to rebuild in the next weeks and months," read the ABLI letter. "Until there is a vaccine, experts have stated that we will continue to live in a pandemic vulnerable world. As a result, individuals may continue to contract the virus, either from friends, family, colleagues, or passing strangers. Stores and companies that reopen, many which have no other choice in order avoid bankruptcy or to prevent closing altogether, could unintentionally allow the spread of the virus."

Strober claims an emerging cottage industry of COVID-19 employee lawsuits exposes business owners who are trying to recover and retain their employees.

"This threat will make businesses, large and small, think twice about reopening and/or whether it is even worthwhile to continue operations," Strober said in an ABLI statement. "We anticipate hundreds of businesses and tens of thousands of jobs could be lost on Long Island and countless other areas across the nation. This disturbing but likely scenario makes it critical to address this issue now if our nation is to successfully restart our economy."

However, sources say that organized labor would lobby the federal government to create a workers compensation-type fund, similar to the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund to assist employees who contract COVID-19 work. That idea is aimed at discouraging lawsuits and shifts the responsibility of compensating workers who might catch the virus at work from their employers to the government.

Congressional Republicans have said that any new stimulus package to aid the recently unemployed and others impacted financially due to COVID-19 would need to include liability protections for reopening businesses.

Thousands of employees are suspected of getting COVID-19 at the workplace. Recent figures show a surge of infections of workers in meatpacking and poultry-processing plants across the country. There was also a spike of new cases among construction workers in Austin, Texas, where that sector recently returned to work, according to the Associated Press.

### Hub International Northeast acquires assets of The B&G Group

Hub International Northeast Ltd., an insurance brokerage in Woodbury, acquired the assets of The B&G Group in Plainview.

With the acquisition, Hub Northeast added about 100 B&G employees to its existing Long Island head count of about 250.

Hub Northeast is an affiliate of Chicago-based Hub International Ltd., a global insurance broker with more than 12,000 employees that provides property and casualty, life and health, employee benefits, investment and risk management products and services.

The B&G Group provides commercial insurance to companies in various industries, including real estate, business services and construction, in addition to serving individuals and families.

Evan Bower, president of The B&G Group, will join Hub Northeast and

report to Doug Schenendorf, president of Hub's Long Island division.

"I have known Evan for many years and am excited to work alongside him on our leadership team," Schenendorf said in a statement. "Together, we look forward to supporting over 10,000 individuals and 22,000 corporate clients in Long Island."

According to Hub, the two companies have complementary areas of focus and similar cultures.

"The B&G Group brings expertise in key industries that align well with Hub and their strong presence in Long Island enhances our reach in New York while opening opportunities for us to bring a wider, diverse set of solutions to their customers, including retirement solutions, employee benefits and personal insurance," Marc Cohen, president and CEO of Hub International, said in a statement.

— BERNADETTE STARZEE

### Touro Law launches free legal helpline

Central Islip-based Touro Law launched a legal assistance helpline for Long Islanders needing legal assistance because of issues stemming from COVID-19.

Volunteer attorneys and law school students are providing free assistance and referrals to Touro's clinical program and legal partners on landlord-tenant issues, civil liberties, bankruptcy, employee rights, unemployment, stimulus payment, insurance and more.

The law school is coordinating with the non-profit community, taking a leadership role in Long Island Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters.

Those needing legal assistance can call 631-761-7198 or visit the helpline's dedicated webpage at [tourolaw.edu/AboutTouroLaw/TLCResponse](http://tourolaw.edu/AboutTouroLaw/TLCResponse).

— ADINA GENN

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