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# Law firm agrees to defend Glendale in comfort-women statue lawsuit

By BY BRITTANY LEVINE [brittany.levine@latimes.com](mailto:brittany.levine@latimes.com)  
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A Los Angeles law firm has agreed to represent the city of Glendale for free in its defense of a statue honoring women taken as sex slaves for the Japanese Army during World War II, the installation of which has been called into question by a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court last month.

This is the first time in at least three years that a law firm has represented the city on a pro-bono basis, said City Atty. Mike Garcia.

"Obviously, there are folks who think the lawsuit doesn't have merit," Garcia said.

Frank Broccolo, pro-bono chairman of Sidley Austin LLP's Los Angeles office, said his firm reached out to the city to help because it has a "long history of protecting the

freedom of expression."

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**FOR THE RECORD:** An earlier version of this story incorrectly named the law firm Sidley Austin as Sidley Thomas. The earlier version also misquoted Frank Broccoli, pro-bono chairman of the firm, in the seventh paragraph as saying the claims in the lawsuit would restrict cities from "expressing their freedom," when Broccoli said "exercising their freedom."

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The lawsuit — filed by a Glendale resident, Los Angeles resident and nonprofit group known for its opposition to recognizing the so-called comfort women — asks a federal judge to force Glendale to remove the 1,100-pound statue in Central Park because it "exceeds the power of Glendale, infringes upon the federal government's power to exclusively conduct the foreign affairs of the United States and violates the supremacy clause of the U.S. Constitution."



Broccoli said the lawsuit's contentions could have serious ramifications.

"If the claims were to be accepted, it would restrict cities from exercising their freedom of expression, educating their citizens and encouraging discussion respecting matters of historical significance," he said, adding though that his firm believes the lawsuit doesn't have a leg on which to stand.

"The rights of the city and citizens should be protected," he added.



Supporters of comfort women say the Japanese military coerced an estimated 80,000 to 200,000 women from Korea, China and other countries to work as prostitutes in military brothels against their will, but opponents, such as those who filed the lawsuit, say the women acted willingly or the forced prostitution was conducted by business owners not the military.



The comfort-women issue is a sensitive subject in Japan as conservative politicians are working to upend previous government statements and apologies about the comfort-women system. According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, some women were coerced into prostitution and deprived of their freedom. Several former comfort women have spoken publicly about their sexual slavery.

Three delegations of Japanese politicians have visited Glendale since the installation of the statue, which depicts a young woman in Korean garb sitting next to an empty chair.

They have all requested the bronze memorial's removal. Their so-called "study missions" were organized by one of the plaintiff's in the lawsuit, Los Angeles resident Koichi Mera, and his nonprofit, GAHT-US Corp, a co-plaintiff.

Glendale resident Michiko Shiota Gingery, the Glendale resident who also filed the lawsuit, said in the court filing that she can no longer enjoy Central Park because the statue makes her feel excluded and angry.

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