

Celebrating “Making Justice a Reality in Our Communities,” in Honor of 2024 US Pro Bono Week

News

October 17, 2024

In honor of American Bar Association's US Pro Bono Week, Jenner & Block is celebrating and shining a spotlight on the impactful work our lawyers do to help preserve and strengthen the communities we serve. Earlier this year, the firm, an international leader in pro bono service, surpassed its five-year commitment of providing \$250 million in free legal services to those in need of access to justice—a year and a half ahead of schedule.

The pro bono matters being highlighted this week touch on the American Bar Association's 2024 theme “Making Justice a Reality in Our Communities.” These matters are only a small representation of the work our lawyers do every single day.

Advocating for LGBTQ+ Communities

Jenner & Block has a long and proud history of advocating for the rights of LGBTQ+ communities, from winning the landmark case *Lawrence v. Texas* more than 20 years ago to fighting for bathroom access and gender-affirming care for trans people. Partners Howard Suskin and Adam Unikowsky and Associates Illyana Green and Lilly McGuire discussed their commitment to advocating for transgender individuals in our 2024 Equal Time Report.

[Read More](#)

Learn more about our commitment to advocating for the rights of all people.

Appeal Seeks Justice for Survivor of Sexual Assault

In partnership with co-counsel Butler Curwood, a Jenner & Block team represented a woman who was sexually assaulted by a nurse assigned to her care. Our client sued both the nurse and hospital. While the nurse was convicted and is now serving 10 years in a Richmond County prison, the hospital – Sentara Northern Medical Center – was dismissed from the lawsuit. The lower court ruled that the hospital should not be held vicariously liable for the actions of the nurse because they were outside of the scope of the nurse's employment. The team appealed the dismissal to the Virginia

Court of Appeals. The Jenner team was led by Partner Michelle Kallen with support from Associate Jeremy Gordon and former Associate Andrew Cherry.

Several Teams Win Adoption Hearings for Clients

Our collaboration between the Alliance for Children's Rights and Jenner & Block resulted in many successful adoption hearings in 2023. The Alliance strives to protect the rights of children in poverty and those overcoming abuse and neglect by delivering free legal services, supportive programs, and systemic solutions, and Jenner provided impactful representation that upheld that mission.

Partner Kate Spelman supervised Associate Kristen Green's work for the Alliance when a parent who had raised a child since he was a baby decided to adopt the youth. Kate's diligence allowed the adoption hearing to go well, and the longtime acting parent officially became the child's legal guardian.

Associate Elizabeth Avunjian, with help from Associate Farryal Siddiqui, Paralegal Christal Oropeza, and the Alliance, also secured the adoption of a child who was placed under the adoptive parent's foster care the same month she was born.

Partnership with United Way of Metro Chicago Empowers Communities

The United Way of Metro Chicago (UWMC) takes on some of the biggest challenges facing the city and suburbs, and a novel partnership between UWMC and Jenner & Block provides legal and strategic support to UWMC to pursue its mission.

For a number of years, Jenner & Block lawyers have worked pro bono on a wide range of legal issues for the organization, including in connection with Partner Andrew Vail's service as the general counsel for UWMC. Co-Managing Partner Randy Mehrberg also serves on the UWMC board.

We are especially proud of the continued service that Jenner lawyers have provided regarding the launch of 211, a service in Chicago that can help residents connect with a variety of resources such as food, housing, utility payment assistance, and other free-to-low-cost health and social services.

In the year since 211's launch, it has fielded more than 100,000 contacts to connect Chicagoland residents with resources for their immediate needs. Jenner & Block continues to provide support for 211, as well as a number of key matters UWMC has undertaken to address the Chicagoland region's most significant and systemic community challenges.

Partners Peter Rosenbaum, Kevin Collins, Kevin McCall, Gail Morse, David Layden, Madeleine Findley, Sheila Kailus, Debra Levin, Matt Renaud, Anna Meresidis, Daniel Weiss, David Robbins, Brian Scarbrough, Jeremy Casper, Caroline Meneau, Martin Glass, Shoba Pillay, Tom Quinn, Robert Rawn, Of Counsel Donald Resnick, Associates Nicholas Luther, Abe Salander, Joshua Davids, Bill Erlain, Solana Gillis, Alex Ryshina, Staff Attorney Alexander Ghanous, Paralegals Michael Hughes,

Cheryl Kras, Research Librarian Tricia Peavler, former Partners Gay Sigel, Jeff Shuman, Shaun Van Horn, Julie Olenn, Jeri Somers, Jim Reiland, and former Associates Miguel Suarez Medina, Jessica Black, and Jessica Martinez have also provided UWMC with support.

Wrongfully Indicated Client Wins Removal from Registry

A team led by Associate Ari Kanavy and former Partner Allison Torrence secured a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) expungement. Our client approached the team because she had been wrongfully indicated for child abuse and neglect. This resulted in her name being added to the Illinois State Central Register, which can have serious negative consequences including the potential of a criminal case and losing custody of children.

Ari defended the client at a contested administrative hearing before an administrative law judge, where she skillfully cross-examined several DCFS witnesses and presented persuasive opening and closing statements. After hearing Ari's argument, the judge agreed that the State's evidence did not support a finding of child abuse or neglect and thusly removed the client's name from the Illinois State Central Register. Paralegal Sophia Goebel assisted with the hearing.

Related Attorneys

Howard S. Suskin

Partner
hsuskin@jenner.com
+1 312 923 2604

Adam Unikowsky

Partner
aunikowsky@jenner.com
+1 202 639 6041

Kate T. Spelman

Partner
kspelman@jenner.com
+1 213 239 2246

Kristen Green

Associate
kgreen@jenner.com
+1 213 239 2209

Elizabeth Avunjian

Associate
eavunjian@jenner.com
+1 213 239 5173

Andrew W. Vail

Partner
avail@jenner.com
+1 312 840 8688

Randy Mehrberg

Co-Managing Partner
rmehrberg@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7505

Peter Rosenbaum

Partner
prosenbaum@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7432

Kevin T. Collins

Partner
kcollins@jenner.com
+1 212 891 1634

Madeleine Findley

Partner
mfindley@jenner.com
+1 202 639 6095

Sheila Kailus

Partner
skailus@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7615

Daniel Weiss

Partner
dweiss@jenner.com
+1 312 923 4517

Donald Resnick

Of Counsel
dresnick@jenner.com
+1 312 923 2656

J. Kevin McCall

Of Counsel
jmccall@jenner.com
+1 312 923 2686

Matt Renaud

Partner
mrenaud@jenner.com
+1 312 923 2958

Gail H. Morse

Partner
gmorse@jenner.com
+1 312 923 2672

David C. Layden

Partner
dlayden@jenner.com
+1 312 923 2796

David Robbins

Partner
drobbins@jenner.com
+1 202 639 6040

Brian S. Scarbrough

Partner
bscarbrough@jenner.com
+1 202 637 6306

Jeremy Casper

Partner
jcasper@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7231

Martin C. Glass

Partner
mglass@jenner.com
+1 212 891 1672

Alexander Gbantous

Department Counsel
agbantous@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7227

Thomas E. Quinn

Partner
tquinn@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7348

Anna Meresidis

Partner
ameresidis@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7229

Joshua Davids

Associate
jdavids@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7210

Robert Rawn

Partner
rrawn@jenner.com
+1 212 891 1635

Bill Erlain

Associate
werlain@jenner.com
+1 312 840 7388

Shoba Pillay

Partner
spillay@jenner.com
+1 312 923 2605

Alex Ryshina

Associate
aryshina@jenner.com
+1 212 407 1763

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