



Insights: Perspectives

New York City is...Pro Bono

March 29, 2018

NEW YORK CITY IS... PRO BONO

Kilpatrick Townsend's personnel in the New York City office truly understand the societal importance of performing pro bono work, and how that work can make a substantial and positive difference in giving entities and individuals opportunities that they may not have otherwise. Through [Kilpatrick Townsend's award-winning pro bono program](#), both New York City attorneys and staff actively devote significant time and resources to numerous pro bono projects, having made extraordinary contributions to their community. The following represents a mere sample of their pro bono commitment:

Hague Convention

To date, the firm has filed more than 45 cases under the Hague Convention, while originating a litigant practice manual in 2009. One such case involved representing a Dominican Republic mother in an international child abduction matter at the request of the U.S. State Department. Here, New York City Partner **Fred Whitmer** led a team of New York City office attorneys to repatriate the infant child after the father took the child to the U.S. for "medical reasons," and then wrongfully detained the child in the Southern District of New York. After petitioning the district court under the Convention's Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction treaty and a year of contentious litigation, the court ordered the child's immediate return to his/her mother in the Dominican Republic.

Special Immigrant Visas

Obtaining a special immigrant visa (SIV) is a long, arduous process, entailing a 14-step application process, multiple interviews, recommendation letters, and numerous forms and documents. For more than two years, New York City Senior Counsel **Jonathan Polonsky** worked through the [International Refugee Assistance Project \(IRAP\)](#) to secure SIVs for pro bono client Hameed Darweesh — an Iraqi interpreter/engineer who assisted the U.S. military in dangerous war zones for 10+ years — and his family. Following the President's 2017 executive order broadly restricting refugees and immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries, Polonsky, alongside other IRAP volunteers from City University of New York (CUNY) Law School, shifted into high gear to gain Darweesh's quick release after his detainment at Kennedy International Airport. The action challenging the executive order received widespread media attention, high client praise, and incited the firm to join the [American Civil Liberties Union](#), [National Immigration Law Center](#), IRAP, and [Yale Law School's Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Office](#) in obtaining a nationwide injunction before the Eastern District of New York against deporting any immigrants holding SIVs or other valid visas from the seven targeted countries.

Start Small Think Big

Donating pro bono legal services to underserved business communities is a great way to stimulate local economic activity. Through nonprofit [Start Small Think Big](#), the New York City office operates a monthly trademark/copyright clinic, where we provide legal advice and/or representation to low-to-moderate income entrepreneurs and small businesses to help protect their company's intellectual property assets, including brand identity, works of creative expression, software, and trade secrets. Past matters include conducting a trademark search and detailing ways to register design work through trademark and copyright for [Hat Line](#) (Partner **Marc Lieberstein** and Associate **Sindy Ding-Voorhees**) and assisting Mr. and Mrs. Clinton Shabazz with trademark registration for [The Harlem Pie Man](#) (Partner **Barry Benjamin** and Of Counsel **Lisa Willis**).

Unchained At Last

Some pro bono service is an emotional calling for what's right and just. After hearing the story of the abusive arranged marriage suffered by [Unchained At Last's](#) founder/executive director, Partners **Barry Benjamin** and **Marc Lieberstein** knew they had to get involved. Unchained At Last is the only U.S. nonprofit that provides legal and social services that helps women leave or avoid arranged/forced marriages and rebuild their lives, as well as the only U.S. nonprofit dedicated to creating social, policy, and legal change to end forced and child marriage in America. As of January 31, 2018, New York City attorneys and staff have clocked more than 475 pro bono hours, which includes obtaining a divorce for a woman forced into an



**STRONG
COMMITMENT**
to pro bono service



45+
CASES FIRMWIDE
filed under the Hague
Convention



**MAKING
HISTORY**
for SIV
immigrants

**STIMULATING
LOCAL COMMUNITIES**



through nonprofit
trademark-copyright clinic

475+ 
hours volunteered to help

more than 400 pro bono hours, which includes obtaining a divorce for a woman forced into an arranged marriage following an 18-month negotiation filled with emotional twists and turns. To further support Unchain At Last, Lieberstein recently joined its board of directors, and the New York City office plans to hold a [Spring Fashion Pop-up Fundraiser](#) on April 5.

hours volunteered to help women in forced marriage

To learn more about Kilpatrick Townsend's New York City pro bono program, please contact Partner [Fred Whitmer](#) at 212.775.8773 or at fwhitmer@kilpatricktownsend.com.

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