

Proskauer Honors Public Service at the 14th Annual Golden Gavel Awards

Proskauer For Good Blog on **February 10, 2022**

Last week, the Proskauer community came together for the 14th Annual Golden Gavel Awards ceremony, a firm-wide virtual celebration to honor those lawyers and staff members who went far above and beyond to contribute to the Firm's pro bono, corporate social responsibility, and community building initiatives this year. Congratulations and thanks to the following colleagues for their extraordinary commitment to public service.

PRO BONO

COVID-19

Coalition for the Homeless

In a major victory for unhoused New Yorkers, the New York Court of Appeals adopted the analysis of an amicus brief authored by Proskauer on behalf of the Coalition for the Homeless. The amicus brief supported the City of New York's defense of a proposed project to convert a midtown Manhattan hotel into a residential facility for homeless adults seeking employment opportunities in *Matter of West 58th Street Coalition, Inc. v. City of New York*. Successfully arguing that the "Not In My Backyard" (or "NIMBY") challenge filed by a well-financed group of residents living near the conversion site did not warrant a "general safety and welfare" review on remand, the case has major positive implications for the future of other critically-needed yet unpopular building repurpose initiatives.

?? [Michael Cardozo](#) – New York, Partner

?? [Sara Cody](#) – New York, Paralegal

?? [Matthew Morris](#) – New York, Special Litigation Counsel

?? [Nicole Sockett](#) – New York, Associate

COVID-19

Compassionate Release

A team of Proskauer litigators represented an elderly, immunocompromised woman in Florida who served 13 years of a 30-year sentence in petitioning for compassionate release given the extraordinarily dire circumstances that the COVID-19 public health crisis has placed on medically vulnerable inmates. As recently as April 2021, our client sought release on multiple occasions without success, even despite several lung-related health conditions that were exacerbated in prison by the pandemic. After multiple arguments to the Court in close collaboration with the Bureau of Prisons and the client's counselor, Proskauer successfully secured an arrangement of home confinement to serve the remainder of her sentence.

???[Yena Hong](#) – New York, Associate

???[Bradley Present](#) – New York, Associate

???[Hadassa Waxman](#) – New York, Partner

COVID-19

Fair Share Housing Center

The Firm represented a group of organizations including the Fair Share Housing Center, the NAACP (New Jersey State Conference), the New Jersey Latino Action Network, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and the Housing & Community Development Network of New Jersey in several amicus briefs forwarding housing rights and racial equity in New Jersey. Filed in both federal and state courts, Proskauer's amicus briefs supported an executive order allowing tenants to credit their security deposits toward rent payments past due: a critical form of assistance to low-income renters struggling during the pandemic. In what the amici referred to as "a clear and unequivocal victory," both courts concurred with our analysis that striking down such an executive order would clearly and disproportionately harm tenants of color.

???[Sarah Cork](#) – Los Angeles, Associate

???[Joshua Newville](#) – New York, Partner

???[Joseph O'Keefe](#) – New York, Partner

???[Omobolaji Oluwasola](#) – New York, Associate

???[Michelle Ovanesian](#) – Los Angeles, Associate

???[Shiva Pedram](#) – New York, Associate

???[Roberta Preyer](#) – New York, Paralegal Specialist

???[Andrew Sherwood](#) – New York, Associate

Freedom of Speech

Freedom Now

Through the Firm's partnership with the nonprofit human rights organization Freedom Now, Proskauer represented a client who was unjustly incarcerated in his country for over a decade. The team petitioned the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which investigated and subsequently issued an opinion finding that our client's detention was in violation of international law, and recommended his immediate release. Soon after, our client was released.

???[Anna Brodskaya](#) – New York, Senior Paralegal

???[Margaret Dale](#) – New York, Partner

???[Yena Hong](#) – New York, Associate

International Nonprofit Assistance

London & Hong Kong

Nonprofit organizations, community interest companies, public charities, and the corporate social responsibility arms of innumerable Firm clients abroad have been dramatically expanding their operations to address a range of challenges affecting their respective countries and the global community more broadly. In our London and Hong Kong offices in particular, attorneys have helped these groups tackle some of the most pressing social justice issues of our time, including climate change, health care access, and supply chain transparency. Across a variety of practice areas including labor & employment, corporate governance, and data protection, the Firm has substantially increased its involvement with international public interest initiatives over the past year.

???[Jeremy Leifer](#) – Hong Kong, Partner

???[Ai-Jo Wu](#) – Hong Kong, Foreign Lawyer

???[Kelly McMullon](#) – London, Special International Labor, Employment & Data Protection Counsel

Unifying Families

Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project

In April 2020, Proskauer filed a Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) administrative complaint for restitution on behalf of a father and daughter from El Salvador forcibly separated at the southern border in May 2018. The family fled gang violence and financial strife in their home country, and sought safety and opportunity in the United States only to be met with inhumane treatment, confusion, and fear. After being separated at the southern border, the father was deported to El Salvador while his daughter remained. The Proskauer team worked closely with the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project to file urgent humanitarian parole applications on the family's behalf, including other immediate members who remained in El Salvador but could not make the initial journey to the border. After navigating difficult legal and logistical hurdles posed by the pandemic – including our client and his wife's own battle with COVID-19 right before their interview at the U.S. Embassy – they received their visas to legally enter the United States. After three years of separation, the family was finally reunited with their youngest daughter on July 29, 2021, and is now rebuilding their life together in the United States.

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[Joanna Connelly](#) – New York, Legal Secretary

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[Ayisha McHugh](#) – New York, Associate

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[Jae Park](#) – New York, Partner

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[Laura Stafford](#) – Boston, Senior Counsel

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[Rachael Walker](#) – Boston, Associate

Criminal Justice

Prison Education

Proskauer reached a landmark settlement agreement with the New Jersey Department of Corrections and New Jersey Department of Education in a class action suit to ensure that students in prison with special education needs are provided the services to which they are entitled by law. Proskauer, alongside the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey and Disability Rights Advocates, litigated for nearly four years to guarantee that New Jersey prisons provide students with appropriately trained and certified instructors, develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) according to students' specific needs, and have adequate monitors and procedures to confirm ongoing compliance, among other terms of the settlement. Beyond the principles of disability rights and criminal justice reform, the settlement has immensely beneficial implications for the ability of hundreds of class members to meaningfully develop in prison and make the most of their lives upon release.

???[Russell Gorkin](#) – New York, Associate

Criminal Justice

Parole

Through Sanctuary for Families, the Firm represents an elderly woman incarcerated in upstate New York: one of the state's oldest female prisoners who has served 30 years of a 30-to-life sentence. Our client is an immunocompromised survivor of domestic violence, whose crime arose out of her years of abuse, residing in a facility in which COVID-19 has already claimed the lives of several inmates.

???[Madeline Coburn](#) – Boston, Associate

???[Jessica Cohen](#) – New York, Project Assistant

???[Rebecca Fishbein](#) – Boston, Associate

???[Olympia Karageorgiou](#) – New York, Law Clerk

???[Rachel Kessler](#) – New York, Associate

???[Gloria Kim](#) – New York, Associate

???[Allison Martin](#) – New York, Associate

???[Shiva Pedram](#) – New York, Associate

???[Marjorie Petraro](#) – New York, Senior Paralegal

Criminal Justice

SDNY RISE Court

Proskauer is one of four law firms participating in the Southern District of New York’s “Re-entry through Intensive Supervision and Employment” (RISE) program. The program provides legal assistance to individuals recently released from federal custody, allowing them to successfully re-enter society. Participants often face legal obstacles distinct from their criminal cases that hinder their rehabilitation and personal development, thereby increasing the likelihood of recidivism. We seek to address these hurdles by providing representation on a wide range of collateral civil issues, including housing, public benefits, immigration, and family law. To navigate these challenges, Proskauer works closely with the Court not only in service to those seeking to become productive members of society, but also as a model for other jurisdictions pursuing criminal justice reform.

???[Jessica Guarracino](#) – New York, Associate

???[Abigail Rosenblum](#) – New York, Associate

Pro Bono – Special Recognition

Los Angeles & Boston

The individuals below have greatly expanded the Firm’s capacity to represent vulnerable communities and champion important social justice causes. All of these honorees deserve special recognition and extraordinary thanks for their roles in dramatically increasing the scope and reach of the pro bono program, particularly in the Los Angeles and Boston offices.

???[Christina Hansen](#) – National, Attorney Training and Development Manager

???[Penelope Pint](#) – Boston, Administrative Assistant

???[William Rose](#) – Los Angeles, Associate

???[Jordan Shelton](#) – Boston, Associate

???[Steven Weise](#) – Los Angeles, Partner

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Food Insecurity

The pandemic continues to create devastating effects on global hunger and poverty, especially on the poorest and most vulnerable. Although we are on hiatus from in-person volunteering, we have continued to support our soup kitchen and pantry partners. We recognized Alexander Griffith and Colleen Hart for their long-term leadership and willingness to guide their offices in the area.

???[Alexander Griffith](#) – London, Partner

???[Colleen Hart](#) – Los Angeles, Partner

Education – Supporting Student Success

The COVID-19 pandemic not only disrupted the 2020 and 2021 school years, it also cut off access to critical resources for students – particularly students of color from low-income families. Our social justice classes began seven years ago as part of the Adopt-a-School curriculum with high school juniors across the country and since then has expanded dramatically. Our Lawyering for Social Justice class at John Jay College of Criminal Justice is entering its sixth year and the social justice program now includes the Chinese-American Planning Council teens, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Debate League, Prep for Prep, Fresh Air Fund, Bottom Line Boston and the New Utrecht High School in Brooklyn. The thought-provoking conversations, discussions and presentations, which often feature the Firm’s real-life pro bono and corporate social responsibility efforts, are meant to inspire the next generation of leaders. In addition, we offer mentorship and provide practical information and guidance. Our thanks to the following individuals who have gone above and beyond to make these programs a success.

???[Hanna After Buffalo](#) – Chicago, Office Supervisor

???[Elizabeth Dailey](#) – New York, Associate

???[Gilbert Desroches](#) – National, Manager of Client Operations

???[Ryan Harris](#) – New York, Associate

???[Szeman Lam](#) – Boston, Associate

???[Ayisha McHugh](#) – New York, Associate

???[Scott Tan](#) – New York, Associate

???[Makenzie Way](#) – Boston, Associate

Financial Literacy

Financial literacy has become a key component of many of our educational workshops, including work with homeless people looking to reconnect with jobs, women interested in re-entering the workplace, high school and college students, or people impacted by arrest and incarceration. Without an understanding of key principals, tools and the impact of our decisions, we lack a solid foundation for success. Matthew Burnett and Mark Kopanda oversee all of these workshops conducted by the Firm's finance team and provide expert perspectives on why financial literacy is so important.

??? [Matthew Burnett](#) – New York, Associate Director of Financial Planning and Analysis

??? [Mark Kopanda](#) – Washington D.C. Associate Director of Legal Project Management

Mentorship – London

ThinkForward provides long-term coaching that prepares young people for the world of work. Through the program, mentors help develop the skills that young people need in the workplace, thereby enabling them to overcome challenges that keep them from succeeding and broaden their horizons. ThinkForward aims to be a place where all can thrive. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion is at the heart of what they do as an employer and in their work with young people. Our thanks to the following individuals for their great commitment to this program.

??? [Natasha Marshall](#) – London, Senior Human Resources Coordinator

??? [Stephen Pevsner](#) – London, Partner

??? [Beatrice Pryde-More](#) – London, Senior Manager of HR and Administration

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Talent Development and Community Building

Awarded to individuals who have demonstrated excellence through their efforts to build our community within the Firm. These recipients' actions have directly impacted the Firm's ability to attract, develop, motivate and retain talent. The honorees below have invested significant time, energy and resources into creating our unique and talented mix of lawyers and staff members.

??? [Matthew Geduldig](#) – Boston, Associate

??? [Keisha-Ann Gray](#) – New York, Partner

???[Susan Gutierrez](#) – Los Angeles, Partner

???[Atoyia Harris](#) – New Orleans, Associate

???[Jennifer Hicks](#) – New York, Associate

???[Winnie Lee Fraser](#) – New York, Corporate Legal Operations Officer

???[Tony Martinez](#) – New York, Associate

???[Sandra Montgomery](#) – Los Angeles, Partner

???[Amanda Nussbaum](#) – New York, Partner

???[David Picon](#) – New York, Partner

Advancing Change

Awarded to individuals who have been engaged in significant ways in bettering our community through their actions.

???[Claire Astbury](#) – London, Manager of Legal Recruitment and Professional Development

???[Colleen Hart](#) – Los Angeles, Partner

???[Daniel Hendon](#) – London, Partner

???[Mee Rina Kim](#) – Washington D.C., Associate

???[Aranpreet Randhawa](#) – London, Partner

???[Jason Vives](#) – New York, Associate Director of Conflict Services

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Fellowship

Austin McLeod is the Firm's inaugural NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) Fellow. As part of the Firm's Collaborate for Change initiative, Proskauer created a fellowship for one of our associates to work directly with the LDF on strategic matters focusing on eliminating disparities and achieving racial justice and equality.

???[Austin McLeod](#) – New York, Associate

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Award

Awarded to an individual who is actively engaged in fostering an inclusive culture that is free from bias and serves as a role model for others. The recipient acts as a sponsor or ally in championing gender equity and works to remove barriers and improve the working experience and engagement levels of women in the Firm.

??[Margaret Dale](#) – New York, Partner

??[Jennifer Rigterink](#) – New Orleans, Associate

Bettina (Betsy) B. Plevan Trailblazer Award

Awarded to an individual who has blazed new trails and opened doors for others to pass through. The recipient, by exhibiting leadership, courage, and professional excellence, has made significant contributions to improve the Firm and the legal profession. The recipient has demonstrated their commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive organization by supporting, encouraging, and advocating for individuals from marginalized or underrepresented groups to reach their professional and personal goals and ensuring opportunities for their advancement. Through their dedication and work, the recipient has left their mark on the Firm and the legal profession and paved a way for others to follow.

??[Bart Williams](#) – Los Angeles, Partner

Related Professionals

??[William C. Silverman](#)

Pro Bono Partner