

NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

# Pro Bono News

2025 Empire State Counsel® Spotlight Edition



EMPIRE STATE  
COUNSEL®

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**Ballard Spahr, LLP**

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**Brown Rudnick LLP**

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**Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP**

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**Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP**

**Phillips Lytle LLP**

**Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP**

**Sullivan & Cromwell LLP**

**Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP**

**Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP**

**WilmerHale**

**\* Law firms with three or more Empire State Counsel®**



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January 13-16, 2026  
New York Hilton Midtown





# 2024 Empire State Counsel® Outstanding Pro Bono Volunteers and Law Firm Honorees

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## Outstanding Pro Bono Volunteers

Elizabeth Puccio-Williams, Esq.

*Akerman LLP*

&

Glenn R. Schieck, Esq.

*Harter Secrest & Emery, LLP*

## Law Firm Honorees

Barclay Damon LLP

Nixon Peabody

Phillips Lytle LLP

Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP

Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP

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**Special thank you to the committee co-chairs for selecting this year's award winners.**

## Committee on Legal Aid

**Gretchen Gonzalez, Esq.,** *CEO/Executive Director Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc.*

**Abja Midha, Esq.,** *Executive Director at Volunteers of Legal Service*

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**Lynn Poster-Zimmerman, Esq.,** *Lynn Poster-Zimmerman, PC*

# Outstanding Pro Bono Volunteers

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## Elizabeth Puccio-Williams

Elizabeth (Ellie) Puccio-Williams is a litigator in the Akerman LLP New York office who focuses her practice on a diverse range of commercial litigation disputes, particularly those involving real estate, hospitality, and healthcare staffing organizations. In addition to her litigation practice, Ellie actively seeks out opportunities to engage in pro bono work. She was recently recognized by the Empire State Council Program for completing over 100 hours of pro bono for low-income or vulnerable populations, and organizations that serve those communities.

Ellie serves as the current Co-Chair of Immigration Equality's Associate Board. Immigration Equality is focused on promoting justice and equality for LGBTQ and HIV-positive immigrants and families through legal services, policy advocacy, and impact litigation. In her role as Co-Chair of the Associate Board, Ellie has furthered Immigration Equality's mission by planning successful fundraising events and raising awareness about the group's life-saving work.

In partnership with Immigration Equality, she has taken on a pro bono case for a transgender woman who fled from Jamaica after being attacked on multiple occasions because of her perceived gender and sexual orientation. Ellie's client sought safety in the United States, where Ellie and the Akerman team connected her with social services and helped her navigate the complex affirmative asylum process. While Ellie began working on this case in 2023, over the past year, she took a leading role, preparing the client for sworn testimony and helping her navigate serious and severe medical and emotional

challenges. Ellie has gone above and beyond her role as attorney, which has included preparing her client's brief and country conditions, and helping the client obtain social services that are critical to her survival in the United States.

Ellie's pro bono practice has also included an ongoing commitment to researching women's health rights law as part of a program run by Lawyers for Good Government ("L4GG"). The research Ellie conducts every month allows local doctors, lawyers, and advocates to understand the real-time status of the law in order to safely provide healthcare services. Most recently, Ellie identified a regulatory change impacting access to women's health services in Puerto Rico that had received little media attention and no English language media coverage. Since 2022, not a month goes by in which Ellie has not conducted research to support this program.

Also in 2024, Ellie was on an Akerman team that partnered with the Transgender Law Center to advocate for equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment for transgender youth. The team filed an amicus brief with the U. S. Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Skrmetti*. This high-profile case challenges the Tennessee law that bans medical treatment for minors with gender dysphoria. Ellie played an important role on the team by interviewing transgender youth and educating the court about their experiences living with hostility of the transgender community.

Ellie graduated cum laude from Barnard College, Columbia University, with a B.A. in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She holds a J.D. from New York University School of Law.



## Glenn R. Schieck, Esq.

Glenn R. Schieck is a partner at Harter Secrest & Emery LLP in Rochester, NY, where he leads the firm's immigration practice group. Glenn advises employers and individuals on a wide range of immigration planning matters, including work visa applications, permanent residence sponsorship, travel, and program compliance. A significant part of his practice involves advising academic medical centers and hospitals on immigration matters. Through this work, he helps secure visas for a variety of medical professionals, including physicians working in rural and underserved areas. Glenn also possesses extensive experience in complex litigation and immigration appeals before federal and administrative courts.

The majority of his pro bono efforts are dedicated to complex immigration matters. Recently, he has assisted citizens of Ukraine and Afghanistan with applications for asylum and other legal pro-

tections and has advised teams of lawyers within his firm in preparing and filing these applications. He has applied for humanitarian parole for families of U.S. military service members attempting to leave Afghanistan and is currently working to help an asylee reunite with her children, who are currently in a Ugandan refugee camp. In addition to immigration matters, he drafts wills and related estate planning documents for low-income residents of Rochester. Glenn proudly serves on the board of JustCause, a nonprofit legal assistance program that connects residents of Monroe County with pro bono attorney representation on a range of issues.



# Law Firm Honorees

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## Barclay Damon LLP

Barclay Damon has a proud history of giving back to the communities we serve, with an emphasis on using our skills, time, and ingenuity to narrow the gap between those in need who seek legal assistance and access to justice. Our commitment to pro-bono work runs deep and is a critical part of the firm's core culture.

Since 2017, every one of the law firm's full-time attorneys, working with firm paralegals, has provided pro bono legal services to low-income individuals in the communities we serve.

In the last completed year, the firm dedicated more than 2,700 hours of time valued at over \$1 million to pro bono efforts, with attorneys and paralegals actively participating in firm-sponsored family court clinics, litigating civil rights violations, drafting wills for veterans, assisting with clemency applications, and providing online legal aid through initiatives such as the American Bar Association's Free Legal Answers program. The firm's investment in communities across its office platform supported legal matters involving many of today's critical issues, including immigration, housing, women's rights, prisoners' rights, community building, and economic development, among others.

As a firm that has been in existence since 1855, a strong commitment to pro bono service has been a priority for Barclay Damon at every stage of the firm's development. Now a leading regional law firm of over three hundred attorneys with offices across the Northeastern United States, in Washington DC, and in Toronto, the firm has more reason than ever to give generously of our time, talent, and passion for pro bono service.

We are honored that our work is frequently recognized by our peers at organizations across the state, and we extend our great thanks to the New York State Bar Association for today's honors—both for our attorneys and for the many other attorneys at firms throughout the state who dedicate themselves to helping those in need among us find justice.

Learn more about our award-winning pro bono program at [Pro Bono | Barclay Damon](#).



## Nixon Peabody

Nixon Peabody attorneys marshal our talents, tools, and resources to be agents of change—pursuing justice and giving voice to underserved individuals in our communities. Our attorneys and legal professionals tirelessly direct their time, energy, and experience to make a positive impact for people in need, logging in more than 23,000 pro bono hours in our most recent fiscal year.

Our pro bono service focuses on three core areas: Equity for people whose rights are under attack; access for our neighbors and friends from marginalized communities; and opportunity in the places where we live and work. Throughout the year, we've secured Combat-Related Special Compensation for veterans nationwide; obtained citizenship and immigration relief for individuals and families (including many who fled Afghanistan following the 2021 US withdrawal); supported greater affordable housing projects nationwide; and protected civil rights and freedoms of people in need.

In addition, Nixon Peabody recently held our third annual Week of Service—dozens of collaborative community service activities and pro bono projects in communities across the country, with a particular focus this year on supporting and empowering young people. The campaign addressed pressing issues, including homelessness, food insecurity, and environmental decline. As a global law firm with deep roots in our communities, we are proud to work alongside our nonprofit partners to empower the places we live and work.



# Phillips Lytle LLP

## Phillips Lytle LLP

Pro bono work has been an important commitment for Phillips Lytle throughout its 190-year history. Across all our nine offices (six of which are in New York State), our 170+ attorneys are dedicated to providing legal services to the poor, the disadvantaged and those in need. The legal services the firm provides also benefit organizations and institutions that assist the indigent and contribute to the quality of life in our communities. This work includes civil and criminal matters, and non-litigation legal assistance, ranging from matters that broadly impact communities, to representation of those in need in high-volume court settings, to complex individual case representations. As the firm plans for the future, pro bono services remain one of its core values.



## Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP strongly encourages its lawyers, summer associates, and business services professionals to work on pro bono matters for individuals and groups that are unable to afford legal services. The firm is a charter signatory to the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge, whereby Skadden pledges that attorneys and summer associates from its domestic offices will dedicate time equivalent to at least 3% of their annual billable hours to pro bono matters.

In 2023, attorneys from Skadden's domestic offices dedicated 7.7% of time billed to pro bono. Firmwide, Skadden personnel recorded more than 165,000 hours of pro bono work from December 1, 2023, through November 15, 2024.

Deeply ingrained in the firm's culture, pro bono work provides vital help to a wide variety of individuals and organizations in need of legal assistance. Skadden attorneys regularly assist those seeking asylum in the U.S. and elsewhere in their attempts to escape persecution due to religious or political beliefs or sexual orientation. The firm's attorneys handle many cases for death row inmates; take on numerous matters involving wrongful imprisonment and prosecution, housing disputes, veterans matters, family law and micro-entrepreneurs. Attorneys frequently provide legal assistance to legal services organizations and other nonprofits on a wide variety of issues including corporate governance, intellectual property, real estate, employment, and potential and actual mergers.



## Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP

Willkie is an elite international law firm of approximately 1,200 lawyers located in fifteen offices in six countries. Among the hallmarks of our core values and culture is our long-standing commitment to serving the underprivileged, promoting social justice, and supporting the communities in which we live and work. Through the Firm's Pro Bono Committee, we offer attorneys of all levels many opportunities to provide pro bono legal advice and support to underserved individuals, communities, and organizations. In 2024, Willkie attorneys worked on more than 680 pro bono matters with over 220 new pro bono matters opened in 2024 alone.

Willkie provides pro bono legal services across a range of areas, including criminal, environmental, family law, immigration, LGBTQ+, racial justice, reproductive rights, veterans' benefits and voting rights. As part of Willkie's continued effort to devote significant pro bono resources to address systemic issues affecting marginalized communities, the firm partners with many legal services organizations dedicated to bridging the access to justice gap through legal support and advocacy





## WILMER CUTLER PICKERING HALE AND DORR LLP

### Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP

A steadfast commitment to pro bono legal service has been WilmerHale's hallmark since the early 20th century. At forerunner firm Hale and Dorr, managing partner Reginald Heber Smith became regarded as the "Father of Legal Aid" after authoring a groundbreaking book in 1919 – entitled *Justice and the Poor* – galvanizing the organized bar nationally to close the gap in access to justice by dedicating financial and pro bono support to civil legal aid organizations.

In 1992, our partner John Pickering, of forerunner firm Wilmer Cutler and Pickering, led the effort to establish the Pro Bono Institute's Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge and ensured that WilmerHale became its first charter signatory.

Over the decades, WilmerHale has achieved groundbreaking pro bono victories, from the landmark *Simmons v. Roper* decision, in which the US Supreme Court held that the Eighth Amendment forbids the death penalty for persons under the age of 18, to the historic *Boumediene v. Bush* decision, in which the US Supreme Court ruled that Guantanamo Bay detainees have a constitutional right to challenge their detention in US civilian courts.

Today, as measured by The American Lawyer's 2024 Pro Bono Scorecard, WilmerHale's pro bono program ranks third among the 120 reporting firms. In 2023, WilmerHale performed an average of 124 pro bono hours per US lawyer, and 98.6% of the firm's US lawyers participated in pro bono work above a 20-hour threshold.

WilmerHale continues to provide pro bono representation at the forefront of the most pressing social justice and civil rights issues of our time. Over the past year, the firm achieved a \$2.6 million settlement to compensate Black police officers wrongfully terminated from the Boston police force based on a racially discriminatory drug test; secured a voting rights victory in federal district court requiring the state of Georgia to redraw legislative district maps that unlawfully diluted the voting strength of Black Georgians; won at trial in a class action requiring the Massachusetts Department of Corrections to provide accessible emergency notification systems for 600 deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in custody; and litigated challenges to laws restricting access to abortion in Indiana, Montana, and Ohio.

Beyond the firm's pro bono impact litigation, WilmerHale lawyers are representing more than one hundred veterans in seeking disability compensation and discharge upgrades, more than one hundred immigrants in seeking humanitarian forms of immigration relief, and more than fifty individuals seeking clemency, pardons, compassionate release, and expungement of criminal records. WilmerHale pro bono lawyers also advise hundreds of nonprofit organizations and small businesses each year on a variety of legal matters including tax, transactional, intellectual property, real estate, and employment law.

The firm also maintains an active pro bono practice in appellate matters, with numerous WilmerHale lawyers serving on pro bono panels at the circuit courts of appeal. The firm files dozens of pro bono amicus briefs each year at courts of all levels, including the US Supreme Court, on issues such as tenants' rights, Native American tribal rights, criminal law reform, immigrant justice, and gun safety.

For more information on our pro bono practice, please see <https://www.wilmerhale.com/en/about/public-service-and-pro-bono>.

# There are millions of reasons to **do Pro Bono.**

## Do The Public Good

The New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) has a long and proud tradition of advocating for equal access to justice for all New Yorkers in civil matters through a combination of government-funded legal services programs and voluntary pro bono service by private practitioners. The Department of Public Interest provides educational training programs for attorneys employed by legal services organizations and oversees a number of attorney recognition programs that promote, recognize, and honor pro bono service by individual attorneys and law firms through award programs.

Call the New York State Bar Association today at

**518-487-5641** or go to  
**[www.nysba.org/probono](http://www.nysba.org/probono)**

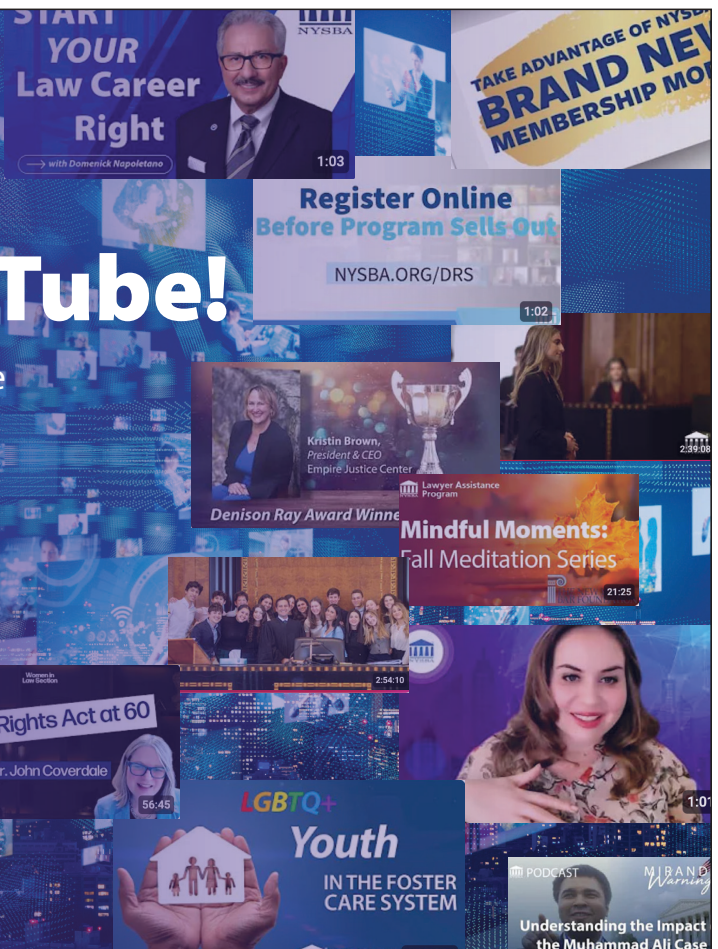
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# 2024 Free Legal Answers™ Volunteer Attorney

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*Since its launch, hundreds of civil legal questions submitted by low-income New Yorkers ranging from family law and wills and estates to consumer debt and property issues have been answered by Free Legal Answers™ volunteer attorneys. From this year forward, NYSBA will honor on annual basis the attorney who has had the largest impact on Free Legal Answers™ clients in the previous year and the law firm which has had the most associates and partners participating in Free Legal Answers™.*



## Annie Yu, Esq.

Xue (Annie) Yu is an associate in the Financial Restructuring group at Paul Hastings and is based in the firm's New York office.

Ms. Yu received her law degree from University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School in 2023, where she served as Executive Editor of the Journal of Law and Innovation and Associate Editor at the Asian Law Review. She earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Applied Mathematics and a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master of Arts degree in Economics from University of California, Los Angeles in 2020. Ms. Yu is admitted to practice law in New York.

# 2024 Free Legal Answers™ Law Firm Award

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**PAUL**  
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## Paul Hastings

With widely recognized elite teams in finance, mergers & acquisitions, private equity, restructuring and special situations, litigation, employment, and real estate, Paul Hastings is a premier law firm providing intellectual capital and superior execution globally to the world's leading investment banks, asset managers, and corporations.



# EMPIRE STATE COUNSEL®

## 2024 HONOREES

The Empire State Counsel® Program recognizes our members' pro bono contributions. By donating their time and expertise our members help low-income and vulnerable persons, who otherwise could not afford an attorney, gain access to the civil justice system. The program also recognizes the law firms that support and encourage pro bono.

**Congratulations to the 2024 Empire State Counsel® honorees and their law firms.**

### **Alston & Bird, LLP**

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