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Pro Bono News

2026 Empire State Counsel® Spotlight Edition

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2025 Empire State Counsel® Outstanding Pro Bono Volunteers and Law Firm Honorees

Outstanding Pro Bono Volunteers

Shaimaa M. Hussein, Esq.
Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP
&
Raghavan Nagarajan, Esq.
Serotte Law

Law Firm Honorees

Barclay Damon LLP
Nixon Peabody
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP
Phillips Lytle LLP
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
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Special thank you to the committee co-chairs for selecting this year's award winners.

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Taa Grays, Esq., *New York State Bar Association President*
Rezwanul Islam, Esq., *Deputy Executive Director, Nassau Suffolk Law Services*

Outstanding Pro Bono Volunteers



Shaimaa M. Hussein, Esq.

Shaimaa M. Hussein is a partner in Willkie's Litigation and Arbitration Departments and serves as Co-Chair of the firm's M&A Litigation Practice Group. Her practice focuses primarily on the representation of multinational corporations and financial institutions in complex commercial litigation and international arbitration.

Throughout her career, Shaimaa has been committed to pro bono advocacy. She has represented asylum seekers from around the world in affirmative asylum applications and removal proceedings in Immigration Court, including successful asylum grants for clients from El Salvador, Honduras, Uganda, Mauritania, The Gambia, Russia, China, Indonesia, and Uzbekistan—among many others. Although 2025 has been an exceedingly difficult year for immigrants to secure any type of relief, Shaimaa has produced outstanding results for many of her clients and their families against all odds.

Shaimaa is also a proud New Yorker and has worked for years to improve housing access for others living in the city. Most recently, she obtained a landmark victory for hundreds of thousands of tenants living in buildings owned and managed by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). Following a class action lawsuit filed by Shaimaa in partnership with the Legal Aid Society, NYCHA agreed to provide \$5 million in rent credits to tenants who suffered heat and hot water outages during the winter of 2017-2018. Shaimaa's pro bono work also includes the representation of women in contested divorce proceedings through Her Justice. She is the "go-to" partner for impactful pro bono matters and has been a key member of the firm's Pro Bono Committee for many years, helping shape the mission and long term goals of the firm's dynamic pro bono practice.

Shaimaa has been recognized for her contributions to the legal practice, including being named a 2022 Notable Diverse Leader in Law by Crain's New York, and her inclusion on the 40 and Under List in the 2023, 2024, and 2025 editions of Benchmark Litigation. She was also named one of the 2026 Lawdragon 500 Leading Litigators in America. Shaimaa has also received numerous awards for her pro bono work. In 2023, Legal Services NYC and the Legal Aid Society honored Shaimaa for her outstanding pro bono service and commitment to justice. Previously, she was honored as a recipient of both the Federal Bar Council's Thurgood Marshall Award and the New York State Bar Association's President's Pro Bono Service Award.



Raghavan Nagarajan, Esq.

Raghavan is a Partner at Serotte Law Firm. He graduated from Boston University School of Law in 2008 and has been practicing immigration law since 2015. His practice focuses mainly on business immigration, especially with startups, small businesses, and businesses looking to expand into the U.S. He also handles employment-based and family-based Green Card and Citizenship filings of all kinds.

Law Firm Honorees



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 www.barclaydamon.com/pro-bono.



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.



Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP

Throughout its history, Paul, Weiss has maintained an unwavering commitment to providing pro bono legal assistance to the most vulnerable members of our society and in support of the public interest. This commitment is a part of the firm's identity, and is embraced by every member of the Paul, Weiss community, from the most senior leaders across all departments to the summer associates who join us each year.

From helping Thurgood Marshall reverse the doctrine of "separate but equal" in *Brown v. Board of Education* to representing Edith Windsor in challenging the Defense of Marriage Act in *United States v. Windsor*, our attorneys have achieved landmark victories in civil rights cases that have changed society for the better. Paul, Weiss lawyers participate in all levels of pro bono work, working directly with individual clients, nonprofits and small businesses in a wide range of substantive areas, as well as handling appeals and impact litigation and drafting key amicus briefs before the U.S. Supreme Court.



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.



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

to learn about pro bono opportunities.



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2025 Free Legal Answers™ Volunteer Attorney

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™.



Kevin D. Finkelstein, Esq.

Kevin D. Finkelstein, Esq. is a criminal defense attorney and founder of Finkelstein Criminal Defense PLLC, a tech-forward practice designed to serve clients across Westchester, Rockland, and the Bronx. Kevin began his legal career at A&O Shearman, Kirkland & Ellis, and Paul Hastings, where he worked on complex matters and honed his skills in high-pressure environments.

Before entering the legal profession, Kevin served in the United States Navy, an experience that shaped his commitment to service, discipline, and defending those who cannot defend themselves.

Kevin is currently completing an LLM at Cornell Tech, where his work focuses on the intersection of law, technology, and justice. He brings this perspective to his criminal defense practice, integrating innovative legal tools to protect clients' rights.

As a volunteer with Free Legal Answers, Kevin has dedicated many hours to assisting New Yorkers facing legal problems without access to counsel. He is honored to be recognized as the 2025 Free Legal Answers Volunteer Attorney awardee.

2025 Free Legal Answers™ Law Firm Award

PAUL HASTINGS

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®

2025 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.

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