



# Pro Bono Work

## Improving Our Communities

Our distinguished history representing *pro bono* clients and charitable foundations is widely recognized. The Firm was a recipient of the 2019 Legal Leadership Award by the ACLU of New Jersey for our *pro bono* work on behalf of New Jersey's Indonesian Christian residents at risk of deportation. We were recognized at the ACLU's "Lights of Liberty" dinner in May 2019. Sigrid Franzblau, Brooks Leonard, Taleen Kradjian, Michael Crowley, Cristin Boyle, and Silva Dechoyan have been assisting the ACLU-NJ in filings to prevent deportations of Indonesian Christian residents of Central Jersey. The ACLU-NJ characterized this effort as an "unprecedented collaboration" in providing critical legal representation to this vulnerable immigrant community.

In 2019, Riker Danzig was also awarded our third "Champion of Good Works" award from the Commerce & Industry Association of New Jersey (CIANJ) in connection with our *pro bono* work for Planting Seeds of Hope in Newark, a non-profit focused on urban agriculture and food justice. Environmental attorneys Steven Senior and Matthew Karmel have been helping to develop regulatory amendments that would reduce permitting requirements for small-scale composting activities, and are also working with the State on a pilot program to allow expanded composting activities at community gardens.

In 2017, Riker Danzig was honored with a "Great Oak Award" by *New Jersey Monthly* magazine, a program created to honor the state's most generous companies. In 2016, Riker Danzig was awarded a "Champion of Good Works" award from the CIANJ for our work with the Table of Hope Soup Kitchen.

Riker Danzig has also been awarded the Corporate Partner of the Year Award by the Hope Chest Scholarship Foundation, which provides financial assistance to deserving minority youths of the State of New Jersey attending a college, university or trade school, and the Corporate Philanthropy Award by The Community Foundation of New Jersey in recognition of the *pro bono* and charitable organization work with which the firm has been involved.

Associates receive regular training in this area and are encouraged to take on *pro bono* matters of their choice. Time spent performing *pro bono* work is included in an associate's billable hours. Aside from *pro bono* legal services,

members of the firm actively engage in community work by serving on boards of directors or committees of non-profit organizations, and on boards of organizations that seek to increase access to legal services for those with limited financial means.

## **Pro Bono Work in Action**

Riker Danzig Counsel Anne Mohan has found that her service on the Board of Directors of the Partners for Women and Justice (“PFWJ”) is a rewarding way to share her talents and energy with a non-profit whose mission she feels passionately about. PFWJ provides legal assistance to victims of domestic violence who cannot afford an attorney but their income disqualifies them from using Legal Services. The mission is to fill that gap and help these women build safe and secure futures for themselves and their children by providing equal access to justice.

Anne has been on the Board for more than 10 years, and prior to her Board service did pro bono legal work for PFWJ. “While there are other terrific organizations in New Jersey that provide shelter and support for victims of domestic violence, PFWJ is one of the few that provides legal services,” explained Anne. PFWJ has trained and worked with several hundred pro bono attorneys who have donated millions of dollars in free legal services to women seeking protective orders and safe custody and visitation arrangements. Children are impacted in a high percentage of the cases.

Anne said, “By providing legal assistance for these victims, we are really making a difference for them and their families. Being in court as a victim is overwhelming; it is empowering for them to have a lawyer beside them, advocating for them.”

PFWJ is also heavily engaged in advocacy beyond the courtroom. It is currently lobbying to include an arrestee’s domestic violence history in the bail reform risk evaluation used for defendants awaiting trial. This bail reform initiative was tragically pulled into the spotlight in early February when a young woman in Newark was murdered by a man against whom she had secured a Final Restraining Order. Despite being arrested twice on assault charges against this young woman, the defendant was released pending trial both times because the bail reform assessment does not capture a defendant’s domestic violence history. PFWJ is working to change this provision of the bail reform act.

## **The Pro Bono Component**

Anne Mohan’s work with the Partners for Women and Justice has also led to Riker Danzig attorneys providing pro bono counsel to PFWJ clients. PFWJ is a great opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way, even though the time commitment is small, according to Anne. “Evidence in these cases is limited, and most trials take one morning. There are not months of preparation, which makes it very manageable for a busy attorney to take a case every so

often.”

Riker Danzig Counsel Laurie Sands attended a half-day free training program provided by PFWJ and is now representing a client seeking a Final Restraining Order against her abusive husband. Even though the case has complicating factors, Laurie says the work for the PFWJ client has been very rewarding.

Laurie and Anne both feel this is excellent experience for young attorneys. “You have the opportunity to appear in court on behalf of your client,” said Laurie. “It’s really ‘on your feet’ training and is great for younger attorneys.” Anne added that both she and Michele Lefkowitz, PFWJ’s Director of Legal Programs, are available as a support system and resource to Riker attorneys who volunteer.

“The client has expressed on numerous occasions how helpful Riker and PFWJ have been and how relieved she is to know that she has support in this difficult time. This is what makes the experience so meaningful,” said Laurie. “Also, helping someone in this way only adds to my practice. It can be somewhat emotional, because the stakes are high for my client, but I’m glad I’m giving back.”

Organizations for which the firm performs *pro bono* work, charitable time or provides charitable support include:

- Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
- Jewish Family Services
- Jewish Community Foundation
- Health & Senior Services
- Project Acorn
- Housing Partnership for Morris County
- The Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life
- Community Foundation of New Jersey
- Children on the Green
- Jersey Battered Women’s Service
- Kingdom Leadership Academy
- Jersey Shore Council – Boy Scouts
- Hope Chest Scholarship Foundation
- New Jersey State Bar Foundation
- Literacy Volunteers of Union County
- Mount Saint Dominic Academy
- Partnership for a Drug Free New Jersey
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York

- Liberty Health Foundation
- Newton Medical Center
- American Heart Association
- Cooper Foundation
- NJ Performing Arts Center
- Lupus Research Alliance
- The Battery Conservancy
- Urban Pathways
- Newark Museum
- New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
- Partners for Women and Justice
- Land Conservancy of New Jersey
- Legal Services Corporation of NJ
- Volunteer Lawyers for Justice
- The Pro Bono Partnership
- Table of Hope Soup Kitchen

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