

# Wiley Recognizes More Than 40 Individuals in Eighth Annual Pro Bono Program Celebration

November 3, 2020

*Washington, DC* – In a special virtual awards ceremony, Wiley honored more than 40 individuals last week for their outstanding commitment and contributions to pro bono matters in the past year. These deserving lawyers and professional staff, recognized during the firm's eighth annual Pro Bono Program awards event, were selected by the firm's Pro Bono Committee based on nominations submitted by attorneys throughout the firm. The virtual event was moderated by partner Mary E. Borja, chair of the Pro Bono Committee.

"The variety and diversity of matters that were honored is amazing," said Wiley Pro Bono Partner Theodore A. Howard. "The range of accomplishments says something special about our firm, and how our lawyers have increasingly embraced pro bono. I am honored and humbled by the work our lawyers have done and inspired by the difference they have made in the local community and beyond."

The cases and projects, along with the attorneys and staff who were recognized, include:

- **The Barker Adoption Foundation – Comments filed on the HHS Adoption and Foster Care Rule**

The Wiley team prepared comments and testimony on behalf of a DC-area adoption agency in opposition to a proposed rulemaking that would negatively impact the ability of prospective LGBTQ+ parents to foster and adopt children.

- *Honorees:* Kathryn Bucher, Rachel A. Alexander, Antonio J. Reynolds, Lukman S. Azeez, and Douglas C. Dreier

## Related Professionals

- **CAIR Coalition: Briefing of Fourth Circuit Appeal, *Cardenas-Martinez v. Barr***

On referral from the CAIR Coalition, Wiley is representing an immigrant in an appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit stemming from the Board of Immigration Appeals' denial of a motion to reopen proceedings following an order of removal. Wiley argued that our client, who entered the country as an unaccompanied minor, has a record of physical and mental health issues which were not appropriately raised by his counsel in the immigration proceedings and which would have enabled him to receive additional protections during those proceedings. The case involves unique issues under the standards for ineffective assistance of counsel in the context of immigration proceedings.

- *Honorees:* Madeline J. Cohen, Frank H. Chang, Holly Wilson, and Spencer C. Brooks

- **Catholic Charities Legal Network: Regaining Home Health Care Benefits for Local Resident**

Wiley helped a DC resident who was in danger of having his critically important home health care reduced from 12 hours per day to four hours per day. Our team persuaded the DC government to continue supporting our client's 12 hours of care per day as requested, allowing him to maintain the quality of life he needs and deserves.

- *Honorees:* Stephen J. Obermeier, Brandon J. Moss, Martha G. Vázquez, and Louisa Brooks

- **CAIR Coalition: Briefing and Argument, Fourth Circuit Appeal, *Conroy-Gordon v. Barr***

Wiley persuaded the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit to reverse a Board of Immigration Appeal (BIA) decision regarding removal of our client. After lawfully immigrating to the United States, the client received a misdemeanor conviction under Virginia law for willful discharge of a firearm in a public place, with no bodily injury. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security sought to remove him, saying the conviction qualified as a federal "firearm offense" under the Immigration and Nationality Act. After Wiley's successful argument, the client was able to remain in the

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- *Honoree:* Samantha S. Lee
- **Amicus Briefs, U.S. Supreme Court, Bostock v. Clayton County, GA**

On behalf of numerous advocacy groups, Wiley helped persuade the U.S. Supreme Court that employers may not discriminate against LGBTQ individuals in the workplace. In the landmark Bostock ruling, the Court held that “an employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender violates Title VII” of the Civil Rights Act.

- *Organizations for whom the briefs were filed, and Wiley’s honorees:*

The Trevor Project, et al. – Richard W. Smith and Douglas C. Dreier

On behalf of the Trevor Project, PFLAG, and Family Equality – organizations focused on protecting the LGBTQ community – the brief provided anonymized excerpts of stories of employment discrimination suffered by LGBTQ individuals to show how every instance of employment discrimination against lesbian, gay, or bisexual Americans or transgender Americans is sex discrimination. The brief explained that “[a]ny attempt to treat these types of discrimination as three distinct categories is doomed to fail and wrongly would deprive LGBTQ Americans of the protections against sex discrimination – in all its forms – that Title VII was enacted to provide to all.”

The American Medical Association, et al. – Scott B. Wilkens and Tatiana Sainati

The amicus brief, filed on behalf of the American Medical Association and 15 other major medical and health care associations, sought to “inform the Court of the consensus among health care professionals regarding what it means to be transgender; the protocols for the treatment of gender dysphoria, which include living in accordance with one’s gender identity in all aspects of life; and the predictable harms to the health and well-being of transgender individuals from discrimination.”

- **Protect Our Defenders and The Black Veterans’ Project: Amicus Brief, U.S. Supreme Court, Jackson v. Braithwaite**  
On behalf of two nonprofit groups, Wiley submitted an amicus

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## Practice Areas

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brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of a petition seeking to apply racial discrimination protection to active duty members of the military under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

- *Honorees:* Richard A. Simpson, Lukman S. Azeez, Alexander R. Lichtenstein, Boyd Garriott, and Ysabelle G. Reyes

- **CAIR Coalition: Immigration Litigation Advocacy and Counseling, Noe Cornejo Portillo Award**

On referral from the CAIR Coalition, Wiley is representing a brother and sister, who traveled from El Salvador to live with their mother in Maryland, in pending immigration proceedings. The Wiley team recently obtained – following a virtual hearing in Maryland State Court argued by John Allen Riggins – a positive ruling that will help the sister obtain permanent resident status. The team is currently pursuing several avenues to put the brother on track for permanent resident status as well.

- *Honorees:* Nicole Audet Richardson, John Allen Riggins, and project assistant Maggie Cole

- **E.D. Virginia Federal Defender's Office: Compassionate Release Litigation**

Wiley represented an inmate in his attempt to obtain compassionate release from prison. Our client, who was serving a sentence for a non-violent drug offense and had demonstrated substantial rehabilitation, faced significant risk from COVID-19 due to his age and underlying health conditions. In addition, the prison where he was serving his sentence experienced an outbreak of COVID-19 cases among guards and inmates. Wiley worked with our client, his family, and prison officials to attempt to secure him a justified early release to protect his health.

- *Honorees:* Vesna K. Harasic-Yaksic and Ashley E. Bouchez

- **Maryland ACLU: Post-Conviction Litigation**

Wiley worked with the Maryland ACLU to help a prison inmate reopen his post-conviction proceedings and move for a reduced sentence as COVID-19 cases were rising in the facility in which he was incarcerated. Our client faced a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19 and had repeatedly been denied parole despite his spotless record. The team successfully

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moved to re-open our client's post-conviction proceedings and persuaded the court to reduce his sentence to time served.

- *Honorees:* Mary E. Borja, Ashley L. Criss, Chloe Hawker, Stephen J. Conley

- **Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (WLC): Compassionate Release, Intake Applications Processing**

On behalf of the WLC, Wiley staff provided support and counsel to high-risk incarcerated individuals petitioning for compassionate release from prison following the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic. Wiley support staff processed the intake applications of inmates, updated tracking matrices related to these applications, and have helped analyze these applications to verify their eligibility for further processing.

- *Honorees:* Project assistants Yehosef Thomas and Jasmine Nazaire

- **D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center Small Business and Non-Profit Project: Landlord-Tenant Litigation, Emergence Community Arts Collective**

Wiley helped secure a victory before the Superior Court of the District of Columbia when the court granted, on summary judgment, a claim for possession filed by Emergence Community Arts Collective's (ECAC) – a community center located west of Howard University, dedicated to providing rental spaces to community groups who could not otherwise afford them. While the defendant had been unlawfully living in the community center for nearly a decade without paying rent or utilities, the ECAC never demanded or accepted rent or any other consideration from the defendant.

- *Honorees:* Jeremy J. Schofer, Derick G. Holt, Hume M. Ross, and Katelyn Cramp

- **Notable Mention was given to Volunteers from Wiley who have staffed the Catholic Charities Legal Network's (CCLN) Intake Hotline**

- Wiley lawyers Stephen J. Obermeier, Brandon J. Moss, Samantha S. Lee, Christine E. Connelly, Rebecca L. Saitta, Nick Peterson, Enbar Toledano, Nicole M. Welbourn, and Paul Coyle, along with Wiley staff Wheknown Jasper-Booker, Maeve Hickey, and Julianna Chuslo.

Wiley also recognized several individuals for their overall commitment and general support to numerous efforts and cases in the firm's pro bono program, including Lauren Burns, Eden Hankin, Jill Franzen, and Wheknown Jasper-Booker.