

# DIALOGUE

Summer 2010

VOL. 14, NO. 3

News and Perspectives from the ABA Division for Legal Services

[Home](#)

[Pro Bono Feature](#)

[IOLTA](#)

[2010 ABA Pro Bono Publico Award Recipients](#)

[Pro Bono](#)

[2010 Pro Bono Publico Award Recipients](#)

[From the Chair](#)

[Medical-Legal Partnerships](#)

[Policy News](#)

[LAMP](#)

[Download this issue in PDF](#)

[Download this article in PDF](#)

*By Jamie Hochman-Herz, Assistant Committee Counsel, ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service*

On August 9, 2010, the five recipients of the ABA Pro Bono Publico Award were honored at the Pro Bono Publico Awards Assembly Luncheon held during the ABA Annual Meeting in San Francisco. In this issue, we highlight how the individual recipients became involved in pro bono and the contributions they have made to serve the poor throughout their professional lives.



## Lan Nguyen

After immigrating to this country as a refugee from Vietnam in 1975, and enduring many hardships in that transition, including time in refugee camps and separation from her father who was imprisoned for 10 years in a re-education camp, Lan Nguyen attended college and then obtained both a JD and MBA from University of Houston. Since her admission to the Bar in Texas in 1984, she has made enormous contributions to the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in the Houston area.

Nguyen donates hundreds of hours as a pro bono attorney each year, despite also maintaining a legal practice with her husband. She has been a driving force of the Houston Bar Association's outreach to the Asian American community and a committed volunteer through its Volunteer Lawyers Program. She mentors less experienced lawyers to help make them better able to assist their pro bono clients. She also set up a Legalline program specifically for Vietnamese residents, co-founded an annual Asian Will-a-thon to provide estate-planning documents to indigent Vietnamese, and coordinated a monthly Vietnamese radio talk show to assist the community with their legal problems. She has translated legal handbooks into Vietnamese, set up legal clinics for the poor in the Asian community, and represented many individuals pro bono in their legal cases.

Nguyen has also done pro bono legal work through the Houston Area Women's Center and through AdvoCourt for Kids, a grant recipient of the ABA Child Custody Pro Bono Project, in which she acts as a children's advocate in divorce and custody proceedings. She has also served as a resource for its volunteer lawyers and for its board of directors.

Nguyen has been the recipient of many awards recognizing her unique pro bono contributions, including the 2007 Houston Bar Award for Outstanding Contribution to Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program by an Individual and the 2007 State of Texas Pro Bono and Legal Services Award. She has established a reputation for never turning down a pro bono case when asked to provide assistance.



## David Reiser

David Reiser's commitment to ensuring equal and meaningful access to justice is manifested throughout his legal career. After graduating *summa cum laude* from Yale College, Reiser combined his study of law at Yale

Law School with volunteer and leadership activities, including as Chair of the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization and Director of the Danbury Prison Project.

Reiser has consistently shared his gifted legal mind to teach and mentor law students and young lawyers. In private practice and as a legal aid volunteer, Reiser continues to mentor young lawyers and assist volunteer lawyers in briefing and arguing appeals, by conducting moot courts and providing his expert guidance on the legal and human aspects of the issues in contention.

In 2004, Reiser was one of the founders of the Barbara McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project, a partnership between his law firm, Zuckerman Spaeder, and the D.C. Legal Aid Society. The Project's goal is to provide high quality appellate representation to indigent civil litigants principally in family, housing, consumer and public benefit cases. The effort has helped to shape the decisional law in the District of Columbia on issues of concern to poor communities, and has had far-reaching effects on the ability of the poor to obtain access to justice and fair legal outcomes. Reiser has devoted over 1000 hours to the Appellate Project himself, and has been involved in reviewing nearly every brief and preparing nearly every oral argument. Some of the cases include advocating for a woman who was convicted of parental kidnapping after she fled domestic violence and arguing in an en banc case for the right of tenants to use the fair housing laws as a defense to eviction.

Reiser's commitment to justice is evident throughout the course of his legal career, and he has received acknowledgment from the Bar and his peers for his efforts. In 2006 Reiser was awarded the Servant of Justice Award from the D.C. Legal Aid Society, for his dedication to and achievements in ensuring equal and meaningful access to justice, and his efforts to ensure the success of the Appellate Advocacy Project.



#### **Sylvia Wambolt**

From her first days as a young associate at the Carlton Fields law firm until the present, Sylvia Wambolt has made pro bono a key component of her legal practice. Her pro bono work has ranged from assisting Florida prisoners attempting to prove their innocence through DNA testing, to advocating for prisoners who were subject to poor conditions of confinement in Florida's "Close Management" system, to helping a group of U.S. Holocaust survivors win a settlement against a Swiss Bank. Wambolt has also represented individuals in habeas proceedings and civil rights organizations to defend federal civil rights laws. The depth and breadth of her work is well known to the Florida justice community – so much so that she is frequently called upon by the United States Eleventh Circuit and the Florida Supreme Court in assisting with pro bono matters. Wambolt provides hundreds of hours of pro bono service per year.

In addition to her direct pro bono involvement, Wambolt is involved in organizations whose mission is to ensure equal access to justice and promote pro bono participation. She has chaired the American College of Trial Lawyers' Access to Justice Committee, in which she served as the catalyst within the College to implement a program encouraging experienced trial lawyers to take pro bono cases of public importance. She is also the former chair of the College's Florida Access to Justice and Legal Services Committee.

Wambolt has worked tirelessly to preserve funding for legal services programs in Florida. She has also been a strong advocate of pro bono within her firm, serving as the first chair of the firm's Pro Bono Committee. She mentors young lawyers about pro bono and urges every practice group to

find opportunities to participate in pro bono activities.

For her 45 years of pro bono service, Wambolt has received numerous service awards including the 2009 Medal of Honor Award by The Florida Bar Foundation, the 2009 St. Petersburg Bar Foundation Heroes Among Us Service Award, and the 2008 Tobias Simon Pro Bono Service Award—an award given annually by the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court to the one attorney in Florida who has given the most outstanding service in the area of pro bono.

## MINTZ LEVIN

Mintz Levin Cohn Ferris Glovsky and Popeo PC

**Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky, and Popeo, P.C.**

On February 9, 2010, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick signed into law SB 2212, *An Act Relative to Harassment Prevention Orders*, a seminal legislative accomplishment extending the reach of restraining orders to protect victims of stalking, harassment and sexual assault from perpetrators beyond family members and romantic partners. SB 2212 likely would not have become law if not for the perseverance and expertise of the attorneys of Mintz Levin and the firm's pioneering and pre-eminent Domestic Violence Project, who dedicated hundreds of hours drafting legislation, negotiating with stakeholders and working diligently behind the scenes with the legislature to ensure passage.

The firm has a longstanding and broad-based commitment to pro bono. Notably, in 1990 Mintz Levin established its Domestic Violence Project, conceived though the initiative of two first-year associates, as the cornerstone and focal point of its firm-wide pro bono efforts. Over the past two decades, the Domestic Violence Project has grown into an important national resource in serving the needs of victims, advocates and communities across the broad scope of domestic and sexual violence issues. It has become an essential part of the fabric and identity of the firm, with broad participation in each of its offices, from Boston, to New York and Washington DC and to San Diego.

Mintz Levin's domestic violence work takes many forms. The firm has represented over 750 individual victims of domestic and sexual violence; helped form and served as trusted counsel and advisor to a number of national and local advocacy groups, including the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) and Employers Against Domestic Violence; and provided training and technical assistance on domestic violence pro bono cases to in-house counsel and other attorneys. The firm has authored many amicus and other appellate briefs filed with the U.S. Supreme Court and other federal and state appellate courts advocating for the rights of domestic violence victims, including recent amicus briefs filed on behalf of NNEDV in *District of Columbia v. Heller* and *U.S. v. Hayes*. The firm has also provided invaluable assistance and expertise in seeking passage of groundbreaking federal and state legislation, including the federal *Violence Against Women Act* and the aforementioned Massachusetts Act earlier this year.

Mintz Levin's extraordinary Domestic Violence Project is now well established, but it continues to develop and create means to address and eradicate domestic and sexual violence. As such, it is the model for what a signature pro bono project can accomplish and can strive to become.



### **Bryan Cave LLP**

Bryan Cave attorneys are dedicated to providing pro bono service and ensuring that access to justice is a priority. The firm has a long history of commitment to pro bono efforts. Attorneys in the firm's U.S. offices spent nearly 47,000 hours in 2009 performing pro bono legal services. Bryan Cave provides pro bono legal services across a varied range of areas and approaches this work using creative strategies and teamwork. The firm has recently focused much of its pro bono efforts helping families and communities overcome considerable hardships and legal obstacles. Bryan Cave has handled cases that reunited families, revitalized neighborhoods

and kept families in their homes.

Bryan Cave has also formed a unique pro bono relationship with Family Equality Council, a national nonprofit organization working to ensure equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families. The firm's LGBT lawyers' affinity group chose to work with Family Equality Council after a year-long vetting process - trying to find an organization that is LGBT focused, non-partisan, humanitarian, has a national footprint and is need of pro bono legal services. The firm and the organization have partnered to undertake a comprehensive research survey of current federal laws affecting LGBT families. In addition, the Family Equality Council's public policy department will leverage the extraordinary gift of Bryan Cave's legal expertise and analysis to pursue opportunities for federal policy reform in this area.

Bryan Cave's pro bono policy is a model for firms nationwide. Initiated in 2006, the policy encourages attorney employees to build on the firm's tradition of *pro bono* work and community service. Bryan Cave gives full billable credit to attorneys for all *pro bono* hours, and has established a committee of partners and a group of local pro bono coordinators who are dedicated to developing new opportunities for *pro bono* work.

The local efforts to select important pro bono work have led to the firm's lawyers being involved in both routine and complicated cases. A recent example of the latter was the firm's success in securing the release of Joshua Charles Kezer, a prisoner who spent nearly half his life in jail for a murder he did not commit. Bryan Cave attorneys spent thousands of hours discovering new evidence and ultimately proving the man's innocence. Through the diligent efforts of Bryan Cave attorneys, Kezer's conviction was thrown out and he is able to restart his life as a free man.

**Dialogue is published by the [ABA Division for Legal Services](#)**

**Copyright © 2010 American Bar Association**

**[ABA Privacy Statement](#) | [ABA Copyright Statement](#)**

**Updated: 09/09/2010**

---