



DENTONS

Dentons US 2023 Pro Bono Impact Report

Grow | Protect | Operate | Finance

October 2023

A Message From Our Pro Bono Partner

Earlier this year, I celebrated **my 15th anniversary as Pro Bono partner at Dentons**, so I wanted to take this time and space to reflect on what has changed and what has remained the same about pro bono at Dentons since 2008.

First, and most important, I remain awed and full of gratitude at how our lawyers and professionals will regularly take time away from their busy billable work to represent clients who desperately need legal counsel in order to access justice. A few recent examples come to mind:

- A group of litigators took on, with exceedingly short deadlines, a US Supreme Court amicus brief that is crucial to the domestic violence advocacy community.
- Federal regulatory lawyers and professionals are providing indispensable advice to global NGOs.
- Lawyers in our Health Care and Corporate practices provided urgently needed advice to a birthing center that serves low-income clients, and that is often their only source of quality medical care.

All of that is similar to what existed when I joined the Firm in 2008. What has changed most dramatically is our cross-firm collaboration and leadership in the pro bono community. Back in 2008, law firms infrequently collaborated on pro bono projects. Fast forward to today, and Dentons is one of the founders and ongoing leaders of the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, a coalition of more than 300 leading law firms dedicated to fighting systemic racism and advancing equity. This collaboration allows us to use our combined forces for even greater impact on the most pressing issues facing society today.

What has changed most dramatically is our cross-firm collaboration and leadership.

Pro bono is an indispensable and immutable part of Dentons' culture.

Ben Weinberg
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The other most notable change has been our use of technology. In 2019, Dentons became the first law firm to adopt the Paladin system for improving the distribution and placement of pro bono work. Within just four years, Paladin has become the industry leader and Dentons lawyers and professionals regularly take on pro bono work that they find on the Paladin system.


The utilization of technology not only facilitates greater access to more organizations and people in need of legal services, but also connects our lawyers to the projects they are passionate about.

Through the growth of cross-firm collaboration and the adoption of innovative new technologies, one thing has remained rock-steady at Dentons: Pro bono is an indispensable and immutable part of Dentons' culture. The names of the lawyers and professionals change over the years, but doing pro bono work remains an important part of the Firm and of who we are as lawyers and professionals. We are proud of the impacts we have made and continue to make, in collaboration with our important pro bono partners and lawyers across the profession, and we are excited to share some of those stories in the following pages.

Finally, I would like to extend our gratitude to the organizations we have worked with on the efforts described in this report:

- Alliance to Save Energy
- Ascend Justice
- Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation
- Energy Insecurity Initiative
- GridWise Alliance
- Legal Aid Chicago
- Legacy Charter School
- National Center for Law and Economic Justice
- New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
- New York Says Thank You Foundation

Sincerely,



Ben Weinberg

Joining Forces for a Brighter Future

Collaboration is at the heart of how Dentons operates. We especially live this core value in our pro bono work, which requires close coordination with legal aid groups and other nonprofits serving individuals, families and communities. We share longstanding relationships and pro bono commitments with some of these organizations that stretch back decades and have touched countless lives. By working together to reach people in their time of greatest need, Dentons and our many esteemed partner organizations proudly help strengthen the communities in which we live and work.

The [Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation](#) (AVLF), whose mission is “to support safe and stable homes and families by inspiring the fight for equal justice,” is one such nonprofit. Dentons works with AVLF’s team of lawyers, social workers and other professionals to help low-income renters fight eviction and secure habitable living conditions, and to help survivors of intimate partner abuse achieve safety, stability and independence.

“We could never begin to meet the overwhelming need for legal services of tenants and survivors in Atlanta without the volunteer lawyers of Dentons,” said Michael Lucas, executive director of AVLF.

Dentons colleagues regularly support AVLF’s weekend clinic, which reaches hundreds of clients every year, as well as its nationally recognized Safe Families Office, Georgia’s only court-based, lawyer-staffed survivor help center within the Fulton County Courthouse. Lucas credits the dedication and compassion of Dentons lawyers with helping these clients tackle otherwise daunting challenges.

“The lives of our clients and the crises they face are often complicated,” he said. “But the lawyers at Dentons have consistently been up to the challenge.”

In addition, AVLF’s Standing With Our Neighbors program connects lawyers and social workers to directly address the hardships of students and their families in neighborhood schools.

“Thanks to Dentons joining the team,” said Lucas, “we are able to stop more evictions, create more healthy learning environments and drive down school transiency rates, all in an effort to help schools and students thrive.”

Claudia Wilner, director of litigation and advocacy at the [National Center for Law and Economic Justice](#) (NCLEJ), voiced similar sentiments. NCLEJ and Dentons collaborate on high-impact litigation and advocacy to advance racial, economic and disability justice for America’s most vulnerable communities.

“Because NCLEJ has a small legal staff and limited budget, Dentons’ pro bono support makes it possible to take on cases that would otherwise be difficult or impossible,” she said. “Dentons lawyers bring exceptional litigation skills, trial experience and critical support during the discovery process.”

One such matter was *Newkirk v. Pierre*, a class action lawsuit to improve access to public benefits for people with disabilities in Suffolk County, NY.

“People with disabilities often have few financial resources, and are more likely to live in poverty due to the high cost of health care, exclusion from the workforce and barriers to accessing public benefits,” said Wilner. “Too often, people with disabilities are ignored and deprioritized.”

Together NCLEJ and Dentons secured a groundbreaking settlement that requires the Suffolk County Department of Social Services to substantially update and enhance its policies and procedures to ensure that county residents with disabilities can receive public benefits. The settlement is a victory for thousands of people with disabilities who will now have access to health care, housing and economic security.

Building on that success, NCLEJ and Dentons are currently advocating in *McCullough v. City of Montgomery*, an important case challenging debtors’ prison practices in Montgomery, AL.

For years, Montgomery charged fines for traffic tickets and other minor misdemeanors and ordered hundreds of people who could not afford to pay to “probation” with a private contractor, which made more than \$15.5 million in profits from this practice. Probationers who couldn’t buy their freedom were routinely—and unconstitutionally—jailed. We are fighting for restitution for the victims of this scheme, who predominantly came from low-income Black communities.

Our commitment to giving back to the communities where we live and work has been part of Dentons’ DNA since before “Dentons” even existed. For instance, when the [New York Says Thank You Foundation](#) (NYSTYF) was born on November 1, 2003, Dentons legacy firm Sonnenschein, Nath & Rosenthal was its first corporate partner. Colleagues in New York and Washington, DC, participated in a disaster relief support drive to assist wildfire victims in San Diego County following the devastating October 2003 Cedar Fire.

Our continued support has been “a defining factor in the growth, sustainability and many impacts of the New York Says Thank You Foundation” and its branded programs, according to NYSTYF founder, board member and executive director emeritus Jeff Parness. Over the years, Dentons has helped the foundation establish governance protocols and policies, secured intellectual property protections and provided financial support. In addition, colleagues across the US have lent hands-on volunteer support to numerous NYSTYF projects, such as the Stars of HOPE Healing Arts Program.

Parness credits Dentons with helping NYSTYF raise funds and spread its powerful message of active citizenship worldwide. “Dentons and NYSTYF launched a national movement, and ultimately an international organization, transforming the lives of thousands of disaster victims forever,” he said.

The tireless efforts of our partner organizations—not only the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation, the New York Says Thank You Foundation and the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, but also many more—is invaluable to the lives of thousands of people facing often overwhelming challenges. We here at Dentons could not be more proud of the part we have been able to play in supporting this vital, impactful work.

Pro Bono Profiles



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What motivated your decision to participate in the pro bono program?

I wanted to tackle legal issues I don't normally see with corporate clients. At times, they are issues that are near and dear to me. I thoroughly enjoy the challenge. It's also exciting to learn something new from all my clients, and that certainly includes the ones I meet through the pro bono program.

Has pro bono work helped you build new relationships or strengthen existing ones?

Yes. Each Dentons lawyer and professional I've met through the program works with a bright and open mind, an excellent attitude and a "let's do this" mentality.

What's your most memorable pro bono experience?

I was part of the Dentons team that submitted an amicus brief on behalf of the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance (LFAA), urging the Supreme Court to uphold the use of race-conscious admissions decisions in higher education in cases *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina* and

Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard College. The LFAA is an alliance of more than 300 large and small law firms working to pursue racial equity.

The brief emphasized, in part, the importance of a diverse legal system. Regardless of the outcome, as someone who almost pursued teaching instead of law, and as a Chinese American lawyer who advocates for diversity in law, it was important for me to add my voice to this brief. Working with a group of people who believed in the same cause made it all the more memorable.



Edward Belotte

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What motivated your decision to participate in the pro bono program?

The opportunity to use my legal skills in an arena that is outside my day-to-day is rewarding in a professional sense, in that I am able to explore legal ideas and arguments that I do not ordinarily come by. It is also rewarding in a personal sense, because the pro bono cases we take on as a firm often have a tangible effect on society as a whole as well as the clients.

Has pro bono work helped you build new relationships or strengthen existing ones?

Pro bono work has allowed me to connect with renowned and seasoned practitioners located throughout the country in various Dentons offices. I would not otherwise get the chance to work with, learn from and engage with these particular colleagues if not for the mutual pro bono projects we work on. Pro bono work has formed what I hope

are career-long bonds with like-minded lawyers who are looking to make an impact and a difference in the legal world outside of their predominant practice area.

What's your most memorable pro bono experience?

My most memorable experience was working on a Supreme Court amicus brief in the *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc., Petitioner v. University of North Carolina, et al.* case heard this past term. In our brief we made the argument that racial diversity in law "can only be achieved if the private bar and the legal profession have a racially diverse pool of talent from which to recruit," and further, "The legal system has made significant progress over the last several decades, due in no small part to the increased diversity in the legal profession resulting from admissions policies that consider race as one of many factors."

What have you learned through pro bono that has benefitted your paying practice?

Pro bono work has made me a more thoughtful and diligent lawyer in my practice. I am able to take a more holistic view of the work I do and really put my best foot forward to deliver the best results for our clients.

Making Courtrooms Safer for Survivors of Domestic Violence

In 2014, Dentons, [Legal Aid Chicago](#) and [Ascend Justice](#) teamed up to address a highly troubling social problem: Due to a lack of resources, legal aid providers in Illinois had never been able to appeal a wrongful ruling in the Domestic Violence Division of the Circuit Court of Cook County. As a result, the most vital provisions of the Illinois Domestic Violence Act (DVA) were not making it into the courtrooms where the laws were intended to govern.

The result of our collaboration is the Domestic Violence Appeals Project. Leveraging the strengths of each of our organizations, the project provides appellate representation to individuals who have been inappropriately denied an order of protection or certain remedies requested in an order of protection. Benna Crawford, director of Legal Aid Chicago's Children and Families Practice Group, described it as "the perfect collaboration of legal aid, domestic violence advocates and pro bono lawyers."

Nine years later, the Domestic Violence Appeals Project has won 15 out of 17 appeals, including three published opinions that have established the leading precedent for applying the DVA. Our work has not only benefitted our clients, it has also improved access to justice for all Illinoisans in domestic violence courtrooms throughout the state.

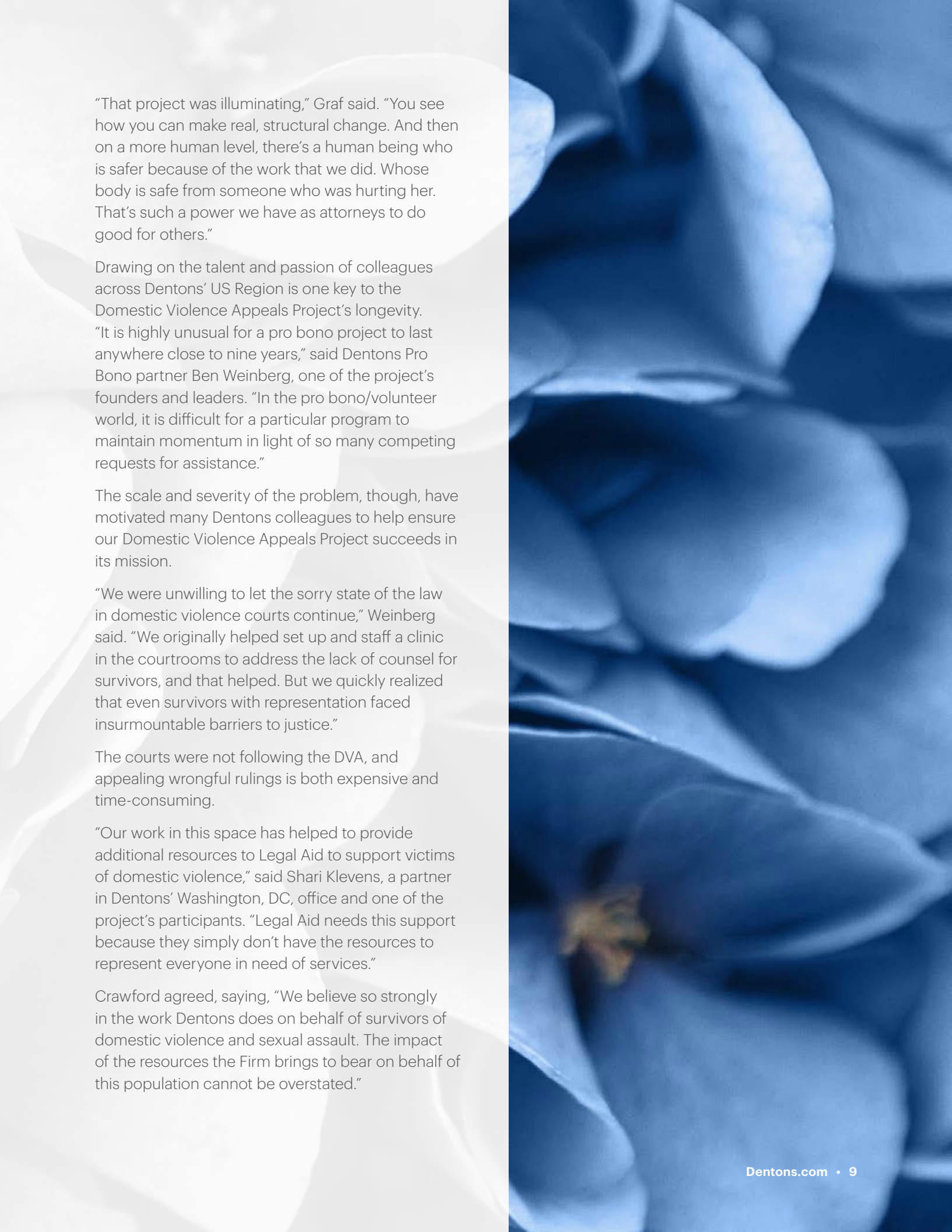
"This highlights the critical role private law firms can play in advancing the legal rights and protections for survivors of domestic violence," said Crawford, noting that the case law interpreting the DVA was very limited when the Domestic Violence Appeals Project began.

Although focused on Illinois courts, the project includes Dentons colleagues from coast to coast. Cases have been handled by partners, counsel and associates in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, San Diego, San Francisco and Washington, DC.

"One of the really big value-adds of this program is that we can focus people's energy from around the country," said Los Angeles partner Kelly Graf. She recalled one of her earliest cases with the Domestic Violence Appeals Project, in which a woman mustered up the courage to take action against her long-term partner, who had been physically and economically abusing her for around 15 years. Although the client showed evidence of abuse that entitled her to an order of protection, the judge used his discretion to issue a civil restraining order—a far weaker safeguard, as it can only be enforced via civil action, not by the police.

"The judge said she was entitled to an order of protection," Graf recalled, "but he used his discretion to issue the lesser order because he claimed she 'needed to recognize that her partner still loved her.' It's such a disturbing reality that victims of domestic violence have to deal with from judges who are supposed to be enforcing the law."

Ultimately, Graf and Dentons secured a published decision from the Illinois Court of Appeals that not only granted the client the order of protection she needed and deserved, but also made it easier for future survivors to obtain the same relief. The court ruled that judges must issue an order of protection to anyone who shows they are entitled to one—a decision that domestic violence advocates still cite today.



“That project was illuminating,” Graf said. “You see how you can make real, structural change. And then on a more human level, there’s a human being who is safer because of the work that we did. Whose body is safe from someone who was hurting her. That’s such a power we have as attorneys to do good for others.”

Drawing on the talent and passion of colleagues across Dentons’ US Region is one key to the Domestic Violence Appeals Project’s longevity. “It is highly unusual for a pro bono project to last anywhere close to nine years,” said Dentons Pro Bono partner Ben Weinberg, one of the project’s founders and leaders. “In the pro bono/volunteer world, it is difficult for a particular program to maintain momentum in light of so many competing requests for assistance.”

The scale and severity of the problem, though, have motivated many Dentons colleagues to help ensure our Domestic Violence Appeals Project succeeds in its mission.

“We were unwilling to let the sorry state of the law in domestic violence courts continue,” Weinberg said. “We originally helped set up and staff a clinic in the courtrooms to address the lack of counsel for survivors, and that helped. But we quickly realized that even survivors with representation faced insurmountable barriers to justice.”

The courts were not following the DVA, and appealing wrongful rulings is both expensive and time-consuming.

“Our work in this space has helped to provide additional resources to Legal Aid to support victims of domestic violence,” said Shari Klevens, a partner in Dentons’ Washington, DC, office and one of the project’s participants. “Legal Aid needs this support because they simply don’t have the resources to represent everyone in need of services.”

Crawford agreed, saying, “We believe so strongly in the work Dentons does on behalf of survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. The impact of the resources the Firm brings to bear on behalf of this population cannot be overstated.”

In 2022, the project achieved one of its most impactful victories for survivors in *Richardson v. Booker*.

“This case was significant because it highlighted so many of challenges survivors face when they reach out for help,” Crawford said, referring primarily to courts that disbelieve, disregard and even blame victims of domestic violence. In *Richardson*, Crawford explained, “The trial court focused exclusively on the question of who was the primary aggressor.” The court placed that blame on the survivor, discounting entirely her account of verbal and physical assault. The court also found the attacker’s long history of abuse to be irrelevant to the client’s need for protection.

Reversing that decision, the appellate court clearly articulated that a survivor who fights back can still be entitled to protection; that abuse is not always physical; that harassment can be equally terrifying and devastating; and that abuse occurs over years, so courts cannot isolate a moment in time, discounting that past history. The appellate court also provided a clear analytical framework for trial courts to follow in the future.

The appellate win vindicated survivors across the state who have been blamed for their own abuse and provided clear guidance to courts hearing orders of protection. Because of the dedicated people driving our Domestic Violence Appeals Project, survivors now have greater assurance that future trial courts will listen to their whole stories and their whole histories of being abused when they seek orders of protection.

“We are very proud of the work we have done, and will continue to do, to advance the rights of domestic violence survivors in court,” said Weinberg.



Pro Bono Profile



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What motivated your decision to participate in the pro bono program?

At the beginning of my career, it primarily was the desire to give back, but also to close a skills gap. I started out as a litigator at another firm that also takes a lot of big cases and, of course, the younger associates are not the ones standing up in court for those cases. So the thing that really attracted me to pro bono was the idea that I could stand up today. Now, I look at it as an opportunity to learn new skills in my practice area as well as a way to develop deeper connections with clients.

Can you describe a recent pro bono project?

Last year I represented pro bono a cannabis nonprofit entity. As a social equity business, it received priority review and approval in the application process for a cannabis dispensary license. When we saw the draft agreements from their potential investor partner, we thought they were not fully recognizing our client's value. Dentons' team stepped in and negotiated their partnership the way we do our regular deals, and it was really gratifying to improve our client's position.

That's the point of transactional pro bono work—to level the playing field. The way these social equity programs have rolled out doesn't make sense unless you find a "money guy," which often results in perceived power imbalances in the negotiation, so it helps to have someone on the other side saying, "You may have the money, but our ability to get

the license is worth something, too." In the end, both parties had an agreement that was fair to their respective contributions.

What's your most memorable pro bono experience?

The asylum cases I've done, because they are so heart-wrenching, and you start to care for these people. Every now and then I will still text one of my clients who I managed to get asylum for many years ago. The things they're running away from are so terrifying and it can be really stressful, first because that is the type of matter that can really blow up to a lot more time than you expected, and second because you're in court thinking, if I fail, this person's going back to a place where they're likely going to die.

At one hearing, I remember our client testifying to how her ex-husband came to her house and was breaking down her door with a machete and telling her he was going to kill her, and in the process of doing that he actually struck her dog, who was severely injured. The judge cut her off and asked, "What happened to the dog after that? Did he die?" When she answered in the affirmative, the judge was just like, "Okay, we're done. I've heard enough."

Nothing compares with that moment when somebody you've been working with has been granted asylum and you know they are going to be safe. It's not an everyday experience in law that a client success makes you burst out into tears (happy tears!).

Giving Young Scholars a Chance to Thrive

[Legacy Charter School](#) opened in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood in 2005. Founded by Dentons legacy firm Sonnenschein, Nath & Rosenthal, in honor of the 100th anniversary of the firm's own founding, it is the first charter school ever established and funded by a law firm. With deep roots in Chicago, Dentons continues to share close ties with Legacy and to support its mission as an outstanding center for teaching and learning on the city's underserved West Side.

"I have been at Legacy for all 18 years and have seen the depth of the support Dentons has provided," said Legacy executive director Liz Goss. "It is not an exaggeration to say we would not be serving our scholars today without the support of Dentons."

Legacy director of development Yvette Warren added, "Legacy Charter School is the direct beneficiary of the vision and commitment that Dentons has for ensuring that future generations have the support of a broad village as they prepare to be the leaders of tomorrow."

In fall 2017, Legacy opened a state-of-the-art building to better serve the more than 460 children who attend school there, from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Equipped with the latest technology, classrooms that admit plenty of sun, and energy-efficient design and construction that earned LEED certification, Legacy's facilities create a welcoming environment in which teachers and scholars can learn and grow, and the community can gather.

This was made possible, in part, by the commitment of Dentons lawyers and staff, who secured the financing of the project through the federal New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program. Designed to foster economic growth in historically underserved communities, the NMTC program provides income tax relief for investors in exchange for investments that benefit much-needed developments in low-income communities.

Dentons' Real Estate team helped lay the NMTC program's foundation and shape many of the industry's best practices in utilizing it. We put that experience to work for Legacy by closing the initial NMTC funding for the development of the new building in 2015, and most recently by unwinding the NMTC transaction and refinancing the debt on Legacy's building, which resulted in a net benefit to the school of nearly \$7 million.

"What's most satisfying about working on New Markets Tax Credit transactions is that you're working on projects that generate real benefits for the communities in which they're located, and they're transactions that would not happen but for the tax credit financing," said Dentons partner Jennifer Simmons, who led the unwind of the transaction.

"NMTC transaction programs are complex and require sophisticated legal guidance for all parties involved," said partner Jonathan Kaden, co-chair of Dentons' Tax-Advantaged Investing team. From investors to borrowers to lenders and community development entities, we guide clients like Legacy through the intricacies of tax issues, compliance, documentation and much more.

“Importantly, we helped the school, which is primarily focused on the life-changing day-to-day work of educating kids, navigate a complicated financing transaction with which they didn’t have any previous experience.”

Beyond offering comprehensive pro bono legal advice, Dentons colleagues support Legacy in numerous other ways, including substantial operational and management assistance and financial support. In May, we hosted 41 eighth-graders for a tour of our Chicago office at the landmark Willis Tower, which included an educational “treasure hunt” at the skyscraper’s Sky Deck. Later that month, a group of volunteers decorated Legacy’s faculty lounge to celebrate

Teacher Appreciation Week. This year’s summer associates in Chicago held a successful fundraiser and school-supplies drive. Most recently, colleagues pitched in at Legacy’s Back-to-School BBQ kicking off the 2023-24 school year.

Our commitment to Legacy endures. Thanks to our shared local roots in the community and our founding role, Legacy is always top of mind at Dentons—for both the Firm and individual team members—in Chicago and beyond. Goss agrees, saying, “As Legacy Charter School looks to our 20th anniversary in 2025, we look forward to strengthening our relationship with Dentons in order to provide a transformative educational experience for our scholars and their families.”



Building a More Sustainable Energy Future

Policymakers, industry and nongovernmental organizations are discussing the pace and scale of the clean energy transition while balancing affordability and reliability concerns. Actions we take now to address this challenge will have urgent ramifications not just for ourselves, but for generations to come. That is why Dentons lawyers are working closely with clients, changemakers and influencers in the energy sector to make a positive impact on energy producers and consumers alike.

One of our longest-running partnerships in this area is with [New York Lawyers for the Public Interest](#) (NYLPI), a leading public interest law firm and pro bono clearinghouse. For more than 20 years, Dentons has collaborated with NYLPI's lawyers, community organizers, policy experts and other advocates on environmental and other social justice issues.

Most recently, we helped the organization establish a Green Transition Fund, which helps for-hire drivers convert their gas-operated vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs) that are also wheelchair-accessible. Our team conducted feasibility research on how to structure and manage the fund. The program is just getting off the ground, and may prove to be a model of how targeted investment can help facilitate our transition away from fossil fuels.

"Pro bono work affords the opportunity to work on projects that are critical to the energy transition," said Dentons Energy partner Emma Hand. "In addition to serving our clients, it helps our teams build expertise in cutting-edge areas that our clients will benefit from, such as energy efficiency and insecurity, and innovation to the transmission grid."

Energy efficiency is the central focus of [Alliance to Save Energy](#) (ASE), a coalition of prominent business, government, environmental and consumer leaders who promote the efficient and clean use of energy worldwide to benefit consumers, the environment, the economy and national security. Dentons serves as pro bono counsel to ASE, providing both legal services and direct financial support. Our team of 10 includes Emma Hand, who serves as ASE's outside general counsel, and Energy partner Clint Vince, who chairs its board of directors.

"The electrification of things—such as switching from internal combustion engine cars to EVs or from gas furnaces to electric heat pumps—has the potential to strain the electric grid if not carefully managed and planned for. One of the best ways to help offset this effect is by increasing energy efficiency, which is innovation that allows you to do the same work using less electricity," Hand explained. "Energy efficiency can also help alleviate energy insecurity, because if you can help someone make their homes more efficient, it helps to relieve the financial burden on them."

Energy insecurity encompasses a range of hardships: the inability to afford essential electricity because of poverty; lack of access to an adequate energy supply due to an unreliable energy system; and major disruptions to infrastructure caused by increasingly severe weather events.

The Energy Insecurity Initiative (EII) seeks to examine these systemic barriers to vital resources. The EII is exploring the causes of, and various means of addressing, energy insecurity in the US and Canada. More than a dozen Dentons lawyers are a part of this team.

Toward the same end, [GridWise Alliance](#) is at the forefront of accelerating innovation to deliver a more reliable, secure, resilient and affordable grid—necessary for both energy security and decarbonization. The organization comprises more than 40 diverse leaders from the electric utility industry, environmental groups, labor unions and other public and private sector stakeholders, including Dentons partner Justin Mirabal, who serves as pro bono outside general counsel, and Clint Vince, who serves on the board of directors.

“The GridWise Alliance has long been near and dear to my heart as an organization that is modernizing the power grid to reduce carbon emissions at scale, dramatically improve resiliency and sharply reduce costs,” said Clint Vince, creator of Dentons’ Smart Cities & Connected Communities Think Tank, chair of the Firm’s US Energy practice and co-chair of the global Energy sector.

Our team has been instrumental in helping GridWise handle the “nuts and bolts” of operating as a nonprofit, from establishing internal bylaws, policies and procedures to handling key governance and regulatory matters. We provide timely updates on developments in the energy and utility sectors and connect the organization with other stakeholders across the energy space in furtherance of their mission.

“Dentons has provided valuable guidance to support our maturity as an organization,” said GridWise executive director K. Malaika Walton. “Their team has ensured we are in compliance with the laws of our local jurisdiction and advised on how to create an appropriate governance structure to provide for growth and stability.”



Pro Bono Profiles



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What motivated your decision to participate in the pro bono program?

I've just always been interested in pro bono, and it seemed like the Firm was very supportive of pro bono opportunities even when I was a summer associate. During the Summer Associate Program, I had the chance to participate in unemployment benefits hearings through the Georgia Justice Project. I was assigned lawyer mentors to assist through every step. I saw they really do take this pro bono work seriously.

So when I joined Dentons full-time, it seemed like a natural move to just keep working on pro bono and have various opportunities to help the community. I find some cases myself, for others I reach out to our pro bono leadership.

What type of pro bono projects have you been involved in?

I've done 10 to 12 unemployment benefits hearings by myself and have overseen younger lawyers. I also helped with an appeal in the Ninth Circuit in an Individuals with Disabilities Act case. I flew to Seattle, on the Firm's dollar, and participated in oral argument before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals after drafting all the briefs on an issue of first impression regarding the statute of limitations.

I worked on a large civil rights case with other associates. Our client, an incarcerated person, was tased three times in 70 seconds while handcuffed

and surrounded by six officers at a jail. After a four-day trial in federal district court in Columbia, SC, the jury awarded punitive damages against two of the officers.

Is there something you have learned through your pro bono work that has been transferable to your paying practice?

There are many intangible things that you learn: how to interact with clients well, how to speak with clients, the value of giving back to the community. But there are also the more tangible: How do you argue before courts? What are the most effective styles? How did the Ninth Circuit react to this type of briefing? Pro bono helped start certain aspects of my litigation career and then helped to refine them. In these pro bono cases, I am generally the one who's out there (with oversight) making everyday strategy decisions.



Cori Lau

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What motivated your decision to participate in the pro bono program?

I enjoy assisting nonprofit organizations that provide vital services to underserved communities and disenfranchised individuals. So many nonprofits do not have the budget to pay for legal fees, yet need legal and business assistance to be able to survive. Advising them on matters such as improving their business forms or employment practices keeps them out of trouble and places them on a better footing well into the future.

Has pro bono work helped you build new relationships or strengthen existing ones?

I've learned so much about the sectors and communities in which nonprofit organizations operate, leading to better understanding of what solutions are needed to tackle systemic problems in the community. I've also learned a lot about organizational issues and nonprofit governance, which helps me be a better leader for nonprofits on whose boards and committees I serve in a nonlegal capacity.

What's your most memorable pro bono experience?

I assist a local nonprofit that runs a residential work furlough program that empowers women to successfully transition from prison back into the community. I've learned that community-based furlough programs are effective in addressing problems associated with re-entry and high rates of recidivism. Nationally, 50 percent to 60 percent of women offenders who complete community-based furlough programs stay out of prison for at least two years, which studies show makes it unlikely they will commit new crimes. It's gratifying to support such a program.

Any other interesting matters?

I assist a nonprofit organic farm that empowers at-risk youth, who may not otherwise receive a post-secondary education, to succeed in college and secure sustaining careers. The farm enterprise is co-managed by youth interns and apprentices, who learn the importance of feeding the community while receiving training and mentorship to become entrepreneurial community leaders.

What have you learned through pro bono that has benefitted your paying practice?

I've gotten to know some of the board members and officers of the nonprofits while tackling legal issues pro bono. Because they have learned to trust my advice, and they often represent large for-profit corporations in the community, they are often good business development leads.

All of us at Dentons would like to extend our gratitude to the organizations we have worked with on the efforts described in this report:



In addition, we are grateful for the dedication of the members of our US Pro Bono Committee:



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