

Chicago's federal trial court honors pro bono lawyers

By [Sarah Mansur](#)

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Federal Bar Association President Maria Z. Vathis, of counsel at Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner LLP, gave the keynote address Wednesday at the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois' 20th annual Awards for Excellence in Pro Bono and Public Interest Service Ceremony. The event honors pro bono advocates at the federal level. — *Sarah Mansur*

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Two Brazilian children who were separated from their fathers and detained in Chicago. A mentally ill prisoner who alleged abuse and neglect by prison guards. A 14-year-old rape victim whose rape kit was ignored for more than 20 years.

These are a few of the plaintiffs represented pro bono by local attorneys who were honored at the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois' 20th annual Awards for Excellence in Pro Bono and Public Interest Service ceremony led by Chief Judge Ruben Castillo.

"Anytime we can ask attorneys to answer the call for service and that call is answered, let alone answered in an exemplary way, it is a great day," Castillo said of the 73 attorneys who received awards Wednesday afternoon.

Federal Bar Association President Maria Z. Vathis, who was the ceremony's keynote speaker, encouraged attorneys to perform pro bono work because it not only benefits others but also themselves.

"Pro bono work reaches those in need and affords them with the tools to be empowered and seek justice," said Vathis, of counsel at Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner LLP. "Devoting time and effort to pro bono and public interest work boosts your happiness, health and sense of well being ...Research consistently shows that regularly practicing acts of kindness and helping others makes us happier."

Pro bono work is also important because it helps to ensure public confidence in the legal profession, Vathis said.

"Pro bono work gives us the unique and special opportunity to connect with people and to assist those that truly need help but they do not have the resources to help themselves," she said.

In fact, many of the plaintiffs involved in these pro bono cases began their cases as pro se litigants who could not afford an attorney.

Vathis said pro bono work is good training for lawyers at any stage in their career, by giving them a chance to learn about a different area of law and handle a case outside of their usual practice area.

"It can provide a young attorney to take a more active role in a case and to build confidence.

"It may also expose the attorney to a different type of client," she said. "Exposure to different experiences and perspectives will enhance and improve legal skills and communication skills."

Alison R. Leff, of Loevy & Loevy, was part of a team that received a pro bono award for their work representing a client against the city of Chicago in an excessive force case.

"We were delighted to receive the award," she said. "I think it's just a really wonderful way to show appreciation for the time and effort that attorneys put into these cases."

Stephen H. Pugh, of Pugh, Jones & Johnson, P.C., was recognized for his representation of a client in a post-conviction case.

Pugh said he was grateful to be nominated for the award by U.S. District Judge Sharon Johnson Coleman.

“She understood the significance of the case and she appreciated the work we did,” he said.

Kaitlyn Luther, of Chittenden, Murday & Novotny LLC helped represent a mother who was accused of abducting her children when she moved to the U.S. from Spain while her divorce was pending.

Luther was surprised by the honor.

“I did not know that they even had awards for people doing pro bono cases. I thought that it was a very nice recognition,” she said.

The following attorneys received Awards for Excellence in Public Interest Service:

- Matthew T. Gensburg of Gensburg, Calandriello & Kanter, P.C.
- William J. Barrett of Barack Ferrazzano Kirschbaum & Nagelberg LLP
- Catherine L. Steege of Jenner & Block LLP

The following teams received Awards for Excellence in Pro Bono Service:

- Lee N. Abrams, Marc R. Kadish, Benjamin A. Shoemaker, and Priya A. Desai of Mayer Brown LLP
- Paul R. Steadman, Shuzo Maruyama, and Stephanie H. Lim of DLA Piper
- Robert (Rudy) Radasevich and Collette A. Woghiren of Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg LLP
- Paula E. Litt of Honigman LLP
- Stephen H. Pugh of Pugh, Jones & Johnson, P.C.
- Jonathan S. Bedi and Dena M. Singer of Bedi & Singer LLP
- Karen Hoffman and Bridget Cambria of Aldea — The People’s Justice Center; Amy Maldonado of Law Office of Amy Maldonado; Amy M. Rubenstein, John R. Wellschlager, Peter J. Farrell, Katrina A. Hausfeld and Leanne S. Mancari of DLA Piper; & Thomas P. Yardley of Robbins, Salomon & Patt Ltd.
- Craig D. Leavell of Faegre Baker Daniels LLP; Sylvia N. Winston of Jackson Kelly; Ferlillia V. Roberson of DLA Piper; & Justin R. Bernbrock, Sabrina West, Casey McGushin, and Reed S. Oslan of Kirkland & Ellis LLP
- David P. Lindner of Brinks Gilson & Lione; John W. Treece, Anna M. Kabat, and Hannah A. Posen of Sidley Austin LLP
- Collette A. Woghiren, Eric Y. Choi, Jonathan S. Quinn and Michael D. Sher of Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg
- Giel Stein, Royal B. Martin Jr., and Maureen J. Moody of Clark Hill PLC
- Jeffrey W. Finke of the Law Office of Jeffrey W. Finke
- J. Kevin McCall, Landon S. Raiford, Andrew W. Vail, Briana T. Sprick Schuster, and Lindsey A. Lusk of Jenner & Block LLP
- Thomas F. Geselbracht of DLA Piper
- Joseph L. Kish of Segal McCambridge Singer & Mahoney Ltd.

- Timothy K. Sendek and Robyn M. Bowland of Akerman LLP; Sara Barnowski of Lathrop Gage, LLP; & Sean P. MacCarthy and Kaitlyn Luther of Chittenden, Murday & Novotny LLC
- Tara A. Amin of Sidley Austin LLP
- Mary Ann Leuthner of Prairie State Legal Services, Inc.
- C. David Ward of Illini Legal Services Ltd.
- Benjamin R. Kinney and Thomas R. Stilp of Stilp Business Law P.C.
- Bryan Krakauer, Blair M. Warner, Caitlin Maly, Frank J. Favia, Jr. and John A. Prinzivalli of Sidley Austin LLP; and Alison R. Leff of Loevy & Loevy
- Craig E. Reimer of Mayer Brown; Daniel D. Rubenstein and Ryan M. Dunigan of Winston & Strawn LLP

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