

## DC Access To Justice Commission Honors 34 Firms

By **Alison Knezevich**

*Law360 (June 25, 2025, 4:50 PM EDT)* -- Dozens of law firms in the nation's capital qualified for an annual campaign recognizing those that contribute a certain portion of their Washington office revenue to local legal aid organizations, the D.C. Access to Justice Commission announced Wednesday.

The commission recognized 34 firms for their donations in 2024 as part of the Raising the Bar Campaign. In total, the firms gave \$5.6 million last year. Campaign supporters say such private donations for civil legal services are critical amid increased operating costs and uncertainty over local and federal government funding.

### Law Firms Recognized by Raising the Bar Campaign

The campaign recognizes firms at three levels: Platinum for giving 0.11% of their D.C. office revenue; gold for 0.09%; and silver for 0.075%.

#### Platinum-level donors

- Beveridge & Diamond
- Brown & Peisch
- Henrikson Law
- Kaiser PLLC
- Katz Banks Kumin
- Kirkland
- Kropf Moseley
- Law Office of Cecily E. Baskir
- Law Offices of Andrea Ferster
- Law Offices of Andrew Marks
- Law Offices of Gary N. Horlick
- Miller & Chevalier
- Sidley Austin
- Steptoe
- Morrison & Foerster Foundation
- Zuckerman Spaeder

#### Gold-level donors

- Akin

- ArentFox Schiff
- Arnold & Porter
- Crowell & Moring
- DLA Piper
- Katten
- Klein Hornig
- Mayer Brown
- Paul Weiss
- Perkins Coie
- Venable
- WilmerHale

#### **Silver-level donors**

- Cleary
- Covington
- Epstein Becker Green
- Eversheds Sutherland
- Lowenstein Sandler
- Seyfarth Shaw

*Source: District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission*

This year's announcement comes at what commission vice chair James Sandman called "a time of great challenge for D.C. legal services organizations and their clients."

"Demand has always exceeded the supply of legal help available for low- and moderate-income district residents, and it continues to rise," he said in a statement. "At the same time, new complexities and uncertainties and the growing cost of providing services challenge our local legal services providers."

At Legal Aid D.C., client intakes in the first five months of the year were up 75% compared with the same time period of 2022, executive director Vikram Swaruup told Law360.

"We are going to have a record number of cases this year, and so we really rely on the support of private law firms to stay afloat," Swaruup said.

This year, Legal Aid D.C. has seen a significant increase in clients' requests for help with immigration issues, as well as continued high demand related to housing, he said. Given proposed local and federal cuts to safety net programs, the organization anticipates an increased need for legal help related to public benefits.

The firms' 2024 Raising the Bar donations of \$5.6 million were down from the previous year's total of \$6.6 million. The number of qualifying firms was also down from 39 firms.

Nancy Drane, the executive director of the D.C. Access to Justice Commission, said the number of participating firms typically fluctuates. She noted that two firms that did not take part in 2023 did so in 2024: Perkins Coie LLP, which participated for the first time, and Kaiser PLLC.

Firms are recognized at three levels. The platinum level is for those who give 0.11% of their D.C. office revenue; gold is for those who give 0.09%; and silver is for those who give 0.075%.

Drane said legal services organizations are dealing with a range of financial uncertainties this year.

"Now more than ever, we congratulate these firms for showing leadership in our community by meeting these standards set by Raising the Bar," Drane said.

Some organizations receive federal funding and face uncertainty over future grants, Drane said. Locally, Mayor Muriel Bowser's proposed budget for 2026 includes a \$21 million cut to the Access to Justice Initiative, which funds legal providers, representing a 67% decrease.

The commission, along with legal community leaders and others, has called on the D.C. Council to restore past funding levels, and a budget vote is set for July 14.

Participants in the Raising the Bar initiative include firms that have been contributing for years.

Step toe LLP has participated in Raising the Bar since it started, and has long given at the platinum level. There, firm chair Gwen Renigar said that as legal nonprofits face funding challenges and rising costs, "it becomes a greater imperative for the private sector to support the organizations."

"A large number of residents would have no access to legal representation without the strong work of all of the local pro bono and legal service organizations that serve them, and it is important for us that we support the local community and our neighbors," she said in an interview with Law360 Pulse.

Swaruup of Legal Aid D.C. said private donations are also important because they do not have the restrictions of government funding.

This is "a very challenging moment for our client community," he said. "And so having funding that is flexible, which private funding is, allows us to shift that money around to meet the needs as they evolve."

--Editing by Karin Roberts.