



DENTONS

Dentons US Pro Bono Impact Report 2026

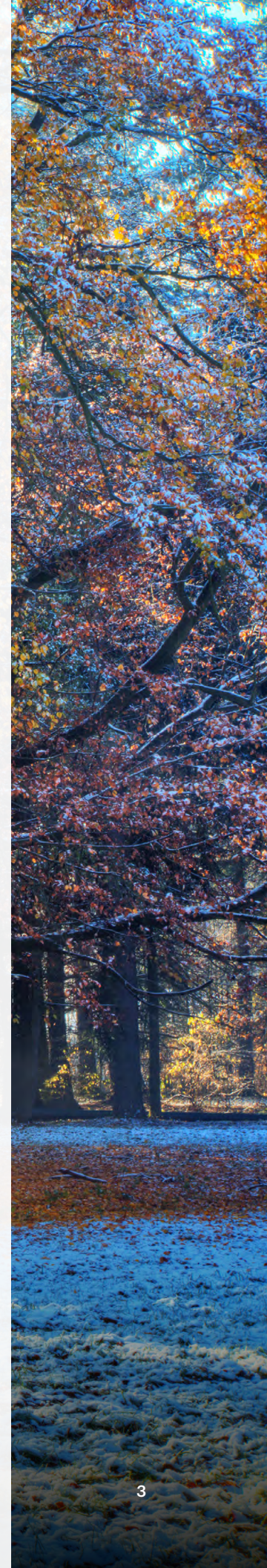
Advocacy in Action

October 2026



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A message of Hope and Purpose

Pro bono is about access to justice and hope.

It is the hope that a survivor can find safety. That a family can move forward. That a nonprofit can continue serving its community. That someone who has worked tirelessly to rebuild their life can receive a second chance. Time and again, we see how legal advocacy can help remove barriers and open doors that once seemed out of reach.

Those stories are at the heart of this report.

Within this report, you will read about a client who received executive clemency after more than a decade of persistence and advocacy. You will read about appellate victories that strengthened protections for survivors of domestic violence and stalking, creating safeguards that will benefit others long into the future. You will see how our lawyers, business service professionals, clients and community partners came together to support organizations working to address complex challenges both locally and around the world.

While the matters themselves are diverse, they share a common thread: people coming together to solve problems, support one another and strengthen the communities in which we live and work.

That spirit of collaboration is evident throughout these pages. Meaningful pro bono work rarely happens alone. It is built through partnerships with

legal aid organizations, nonprofit leaders, courts, community advocates and clients who share a commitment to serving others. Together, those relationships allow us to accomplish more than any one organization could achieve on its own.

The stories in this report also reflect something that has long defined Dentons’ approach to pro bono service: a willingness to stay committed for the long term. Whether representing a client through years of litigation, supporting organizations that strengthen communities, or helping develop legal protections that will benefit future generations, we believe meaningful change often requires persistence, patience and partnership.

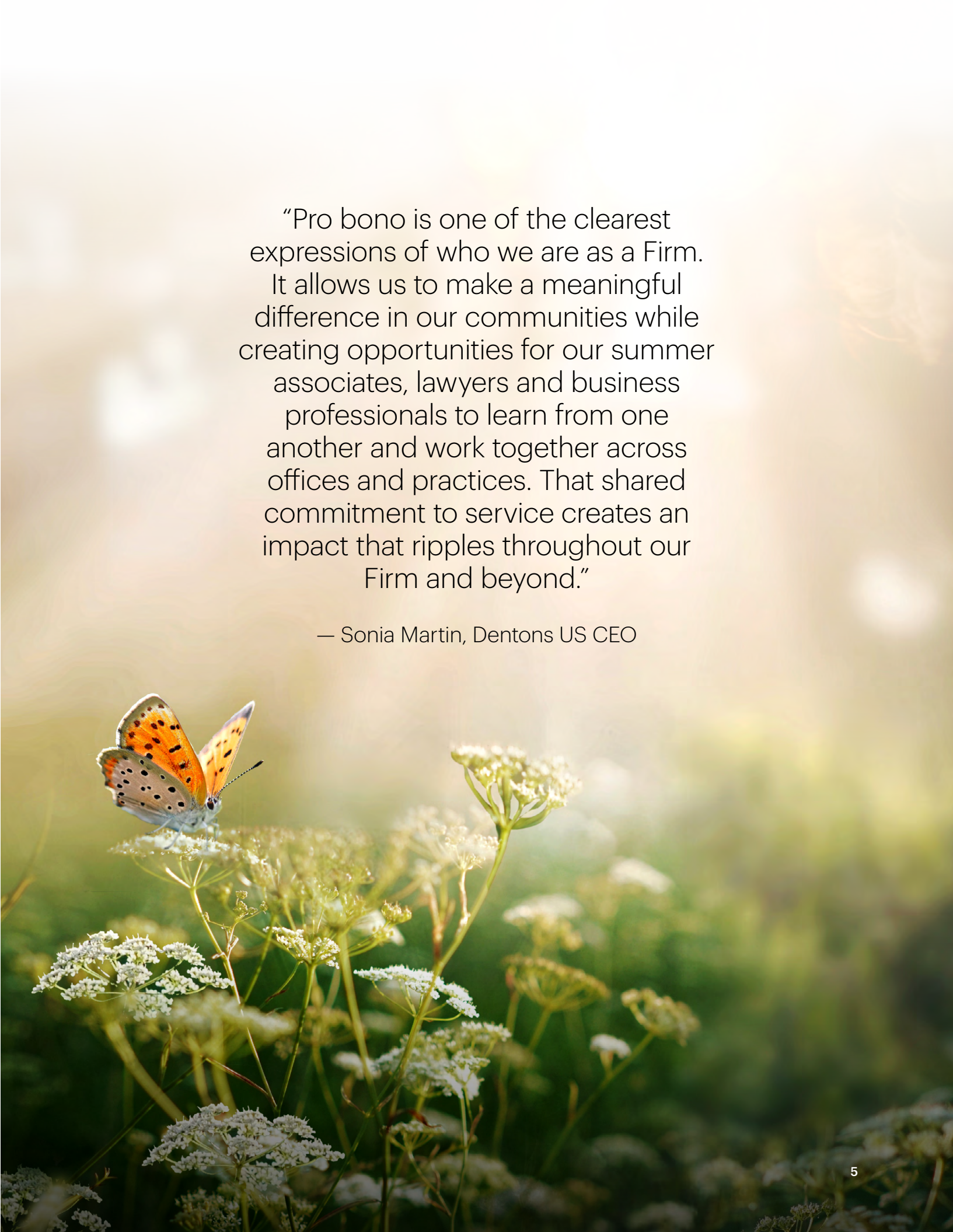
On behalf of Dentons, thank you to the clients, nonprofit organizations, community partners and colleagues whose dedication makes this work possible. We are proud of what we have accomplished together and grateful for the opportunity to continue using our skills in service of our communities.



Ben Weinberg
Pro Bono Partner

“Pro bono is one of the clearest expressions of who we are as a Firm. It allows us to make a meaningful difference in our communities while creating opportunities for our summer associates, lawyers and business professionals to learn from one another and work together across offices and practices. That shared commitment to service creates an impact that ripples throughout our Firm and beyond.”

— Sonia Martin, Dentons US CEO



A Long-Fought Clemency Success Story

The consequences of a conviction often extend far beyond the formal terms of incarceration or probation, as our client, a survivor of domestic violence, knew all too well. Years earlier, she had been convicted of second-degree murder arising from the accidental killing of an abusive boyfriend. Recognizing the difficult circumstances of the case, the court sentenced her to four years of probation, which she completed successfully. During that time and moving forward, she rebuilt her life—earning her GED, bachelor’s degree and master’s degree, becoming a counselor for individuals living with addiction and domestic violence, and serving as a leader in her church.

Yet despite her extraordinary achievements, our client’s conviction continued to cast a long shadow. As a survivor of domestic violence who had overcome addiction and was pursuing a PhD, she found her record repeatedly blocking employment opportunities and limiting her ability to serve her community. Everything she had worked so hard to achieve remained at risk.

Dentons first began representing this pro bono client nearly twelve years ago as part of a large clemency initiative undertaken in partnership with a longtime client, involving dozens of Dentons lawyers. Although her initial clemency petition was denied, the team persisted. In 2018, Dentons successfully persuaded the presiding judge of the

criminal division in the Circuit Court of Cook County to seal her conviction—relief that prevented most employers from accessing her record. The matter was led by Scott Turow, a former Dentons partner and renowned author of *Presumed Innocent*, who is a longtime advocate for pro bono service and public-interest legal work. However, many of the positions she sought required background checks, leaving significant barriers in place.

The only remaining path to fully remove those barriers was executive clemency. In April 2025, Dentons filed a renewed clemency petition and appeared on our client’s behalf before the Illinois Prison Review Board. After more than a decade of determined advocacy, she was granted clemency by Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker in December 2025.

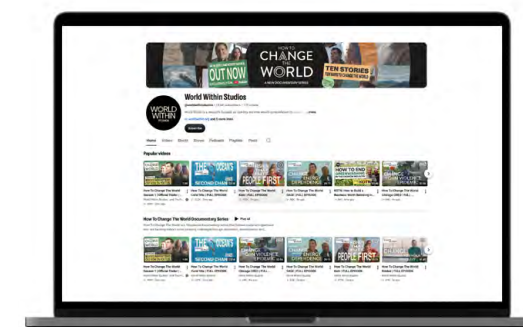
The clemency grant opened the door to the final step our client had pursued for years: clearing her record. Dentons continued to work alongside her and, in September 2026, helped secure an order from the trial court expunging her conviction. With her record cleared, she finally received the fresh start she had long sought. She wrote, “Thank you so much!! But congratulations go to Dentons as well because you all have been with me EVERY step of the way.... To God be the glory! Man, after 36 years, I’m truly blessed.” The result closed a decades-long chapter for a long-time pro bono client and reflects the power of sustained advocacy, partnership and belief in a client’s future.

Now Streaming: Pro Bono Impact In Action

A Dentons pro bono matter is featured in **How to Change the World**, a new documentary series highlighting social entrepreneurs who are driving positive change in their communities. *Episode Paladin – This Is How We Make Justice Accessible to Everyone* follows Paladin CEO Kristen Sondag and a Dentons pro bono team, including partner Tim Storino and senior managing associate Samantha Siegien, as they partner with Cabrini Green Legal Aid to represent a client, demonstrating how innovation, collaboration and legal advocacy can expand access to justice.

Watch Episode Paladin of How to Change the World, now available on the World Within Studios YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/@worldwithinstudios>





Dentons and Seeds of Fortune are helping build connections that can continue well beyond the program itself.

Seeds of Fortune: From Mentorship to Opportunity

Since 2023, Dentons has partnered with Seeds of Fortune to help young women from underrepresented backgrounds build the skills, confidence and connections to support their academic and professional futures. Seeds of Fortune prepares scholars for college and the workforce through mentorship, career development and other opportunities.

Through the High School Innovation Research Program, scholars spend six weeks with Dentons lawyers and professionals to analyze current social justice issues and how Dentons can be more impactful in our communities. The experience gives students an opportunity to put academic learning into practice while developing skills in research, problem-solving, communication and presenting their ideas. It also creates meaningful connections between scholars and Dentons lawyers and professionals, who share their own backgrounds, career paths and experiences.

Over the years, that connection has continued to grow. To date, Dentons has directly impacted 54 scholars through the program, and the 2025 cohort was the

largest yet, with 24 scholars. One program alumna went on to intern with Dentons in summer 2025, extending a relationship that began through Seeds of Fortune into an early professional opportunity. Scholars from our 2024 cohort went on to attend colleges including New York University, University of Notre Dame, Johns Hopkins University, Santa Clara University, Yale University, Vassar College, and The Pennsylvania State University, among others.

The 2025 program culminated at Dentons' New York office, where four teams of six rising high school seniors presented solutions to pressing issues in their communities to a panel of Dentons judges. After a closely contested deliberation, the judges selected Justice Without Barriers, whose project focused on children in foster care.

For Dentons, the partnership is about more than a six-week program. By giving scholars space to test their ideas, learn directly from professionals and see themselves in new environments, Dentons and Seeds of Fortune are helping build connections that can continue well beyond the program itself.

Domestic Violence Appeals Project: Protecting Survivors, Shaping the Law

Domestic Violence Appeals Project



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Years



5

Published
Opinions



23

Winning
Appeals



3

Lost
Appeals



8

Dentons
Offices

Project Update: Sustained Advocacy for Survivors

Now in its 13th year, Dentons’ Domestic Violence Appeals Project continues to make a lasting impact for survivors across Illinois. Lawyers across eight Dentons offices have worked on these matters, reflecting the project’s firmwide reach and shared commitment to supporting survivors.

Many of the survivors served through the project have spent years advocating for themselves, navigating the courts, government agencies and other challenges without consistent support. This year, the project secured two significant appellate victories that not only protected individual clients but also strengthened legal protections for future survivors. One of these victories is profiled below in the Case Deep Dive, illustrating how one survivor’s search for protection helped clarify the law for others facing similar threats.

Together, these victories—and many others on behalf of domestic violence survivors—demonstrate the dual purpose of the Domestic Violence Appeals Project: helping individual clients find safety and stability while contributing to the development of the law for those who follow. The following case illustrates how that work can turn one survivor’s search for protection into precedent with broader reach.

Case Deep Dive:

A Precedent for Protection

When a survivor of workplace stalking and abuse turned to the legal system for protection, he found himself caught between conflicting directives. Law enforcement told him he needed a court order before they could act. But when he obtained a hearing and established that he had been stalked, the court declined to issue the very protection the law was designed to provide.

A team of lawyers from four Dentons offices, led by Washington, DC partner Shari Klevens, Atlanta partner Sean Kirwin and Washington, DC associate Shalin Shah, with support from Chicago associate Josh Concannon and Phoenix senior paralegal Beth Connor, secured a unanimous victory before the Illinois Appellate Court that not only provides meaningful protection for one survivor, but also strengthens legal protections for future victims of stalking across Illinois.

The client had endured months of harassment and violence from a coworker. The abuse included slurs, unwanted physical aggression, threats and an incident in which the abuser physically assaulted him while threatening to kill him. Following the attack, the client sought help from

police, who advised him to obtain a Stalking No Contact Order (SNCO).

Although the trial court found that the respondent's conduct met the legal definition of stalking, it nevertheless denied the order because the two individuals no longer worked together. Instead, the court suggested that the respondent had "some growing up to do" and advised him to stay away from the client.

For the survivor, the ruling left a dangerous gap in protection. Without a court order, law enforcement lacked an immediate mechanism to intervene if the abuse continued. The client was effectively told by police to seek judicial protection, while the court pointed him back toward law enforcement. The result was that a survivor who had already established he was the victim of stalking remained vulnerable to further harm.

On appeal, Dentons argued that the trial court lacked discretion to deny the order once it found that stalking had occurred. The Illinois Stalking No Contact Order Act states that when a court finds a petitioner has been a victim of stalking, a stalking no contact order "shall issue."

For the survivor, the ruling left a dangerous gap in protection. Dentons helped change that.



Drawing in part on Dentons' successful 2016 appellate victory in *Sanchez v. Torres*, which involved similar mandatory language under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act, the team argued that the statutory protections were intended to provide immediate and meaningful safeguards for survivors. Dentons also demonstrated that stalking orders are designed to prevent future contact regardless of whether the parties still share a workplace, residence or other common location.

The appellate court reversed the denial of the order, recognizing that the trial court's ruling undermined the purpose of the statute and deprived the survivor of the ability to quickly seek protection if future stalking occurred. As a result of the ruling, the client now has meaningful legal safeguards in place. If the respondent attempts further contact, law enforcement can take immediate action.

The decision's impact extends well beyond a single case. By confirming that courts must issue a stalking no contact order once stalking has been established, the ruling creates important precedent for future survivors seeking protection. It clarifies the mandatory nature of the statute and helps ensure that victims are not denied relief based on a judge's assessment that future contact seems unlikely.

The broader significance of the decision is already being recognized. Legal Aid Chicago's Domestic Violence Division expects the ruling to influence future stalking and no-contact order cases throughout the state and plans to incorporate the decision into judicial training programs for Illinois judges.

For one survivor, the outcome means greater safety, stability and peace of mind. For future survivors, it reinforces a critical principle: when the law provides protection, courts must ensure that protection is available before the next act of abuse occurs.

Through this appellate victory, Dentons helped secure both an individual's safety and a stronger legal framework for others who may face similar threats in the future.

The appellate court unanimously
agreed with Dentons.

Lawyer Spotlight:

Shari Klevens

Behind the appellate victory was a team of lawyers committed to ensuring that the law works as intended for survivors seeking protection. For Washington, DC Partner Shari Klevens, who helped lead the successful appeal, that commitment reflects a broader view of pro bono service as both a professional responsibility and a defining part of her career as a seasoned litigator. We spoke with her about the impact of the Domestic Violence Appeals Project, what continues to motivate her, and why pro bono remains central to the way she thinks about advocacy and client service.

“Pro bono has been a key part of my identity as a lawyer and something I always make time to do.”



Shari Klevens

What keeps you committed to representing survivors through the Domestic Violence Appeals Project?

Notwithstanding my demanding practice, I have always made it a personal requirement to engage in pro bono work as well. I feel a responsibility to serve the community and provide legal services to individuals or organizations that typically would not receive support without our assistance. The clients I have worked with through the Domestic Violence Appeals Project often need someone in their corner after years of advocating for themselves, whether in court, with government agencies, or in life.

Your team recently secured an appellate victory that may influence future cases, profiled earlier in this report. What does it mean when a case has the potential to impact not just one client, but many survivors who follow?

This appellate victory will help to shape this area of the law going forward, increasing the likelihood of success for other survivors facing similar issues. It is incredibly rewarding to know that our work can have such a broad impact. However, many of our matters do not have that kind of widespread application. Instead, they help restore some order to the life of a single survivor, and those cases are every bit as valuable and rewarding.

How has pro bono work shaped the way you think about client service and advocacy?

Pro bono work has been a very important part of my career. I started taking on pro bono matters as an associate as a way to give back while gaining litigation experience and responsibility that is harder to come by on other matters. Those opportunities taught me not only litigation skills, but also how to take ownership of a case and serve as the primary decision-maker early in my career. Over time, I’ve found that the skills developed through pro bono work are equally valuable in serving our paying clients. At the end of the day, we are in the client service business, and pro bono work has reinforced the importance of tailoring that service to each client’s unique needs.

What would you say to lawyers who want to make pro bono work a part of their practice?

There are so many opportunities to do pro bono work at whatever level is comfortable for each person. For example, through our Domestic Violence Appeals Project, which has the potential to further shape the law in this area, junior lawyers who are learning how to develop an appellate strategy can gain valuable experience. Pro bono work is not only an ethical calling for lawyers, but it can also be a great opportunity to develop skills while serving the community.

Harold Hirshman, Recipient of the 2026 Rothschild Pro Bono Award



Through his work, Harold reminds us that the law is at its best when it changes the lives of those most in need, and we are proud to honor him with the 2026 Rothschild Pro Bono Award.

The Dentons Rothschild Pro Bono Award is one of the Firm's highest honors for pro bono service. Named for former Dentons lawyer and civil liberties advocate Ed Rothschild, the award recognizes lawyers who have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to advancing civil rights, civil liberties and access to justice through sustained pro bono work. Like Ed, Harold Hirshman has devoted his career not only to the practice of law, but to using it as a force for dignity, fairness and meaningful change. Dentons is pleased to announce Harold as the 2026 recipient of the Rothschild Pro Bono Award.

For more than a decade, Harold has dedicated thousands of hours to representing some of society's most vulnerable individuals: incarcerated people whose treatment has violated constitutional and statutory protections. As lead counsel in two major federal class actions on behalf of prison inmates with serious mental and physical illnesses, and through numerous individual representations, Harold has fought tirelessly to ensure that those whose voices are often overlooked are treated with humanity and respect. These are challenging, hard-fought cases, but Harold's commitment to fighting for justice and humane treatment persists.

Harold's commitment to public service extends beyond the courtroom. In one of the most memorable examples of his advocacy, Harold organized concerts featuring hip hop and other musicians at Stateville Prison and the Cook County Jail. The events brought joy, inspiration and a rare connection to the outside world for incarcerated individuals. Remarkably, wardens at both facilities, despite being defendants in litigation Harold was pursuing, expressed gratitude for Dentons' support, recognizing the transformative power of art and human connection.

Harold's devotion to pro bono service has been a hallmark of his career. Long regarded as both a standout litigator and a tireless advocate for those in need, he was honored two decades ago with the Chicago Bar Foundation's Edward Lewis Award, one of the legal community's most prestigious recognitions for pro bono work. Yet colleagues are just as likely to describe Harold not by the awards he has earned, but by the example he sets: a lawyer of exceptional skill, integrity, compassion and courage.

Partnering for Greater Impact

Some challenges are simply too large to tackle alone. That is why Dentons continually seeks opportunities to partner with clients on pro bono initiatives that create meaningful and lasting impact. These collaborations not only strengthen communities, but also deepen relationships with clients by working side by side on issues that reflect our shared values and commitment to service.

Our recent collaboration with Zurich American Insurance Company in support of ECPAT International builds on a longstanding relationship between Dentons and ECPAT, as well as our commitment to engaging clients in impactful pro bono work. In 2024, Dentons partnered with PayPal and ECPAT on a similar cross-border research initiative focused on strengthening protections for children from online exploitation. The success of that effort demonstrated the value of bringing together law firms, corporate legal departments and nonprofit organizations to address complex global challenges through coordinated action.

Earlier this year, Dentons expanded that model through Zurich Legal's inaugural Global Pro Bono Day. Working alongside approximately 100 lawyers from Zurich, our team coordinated a global research sprint spanning three regions: Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and Africa.

Dentons played a central role in designing, coordinating and supporting the initiative. Professionals from across our US, European and global offices organized volunteers, facilitated research sessions across multiple time zones and implemented a two-week engagement model that enabled deeper analysis and broader participation.

The firm's global reach and collaborative approach helped transform an ambitious idea into a coordinated international effort.

The most recent phase of the project focused on ECPAT's global child protection indicator examining how national laws and policies across jurisdictions around the world address online child exploitation and related content. Using an ECPAT-developed research framework, volunteers analyzed legislation in 89 jurisdictions, including eight US states, evaluating differences in legal definitions, the continued use of outdated terminology, challenges to international cooperation and enforcement, and emerging legal gaps created by rapidly evolving technologies, including AI-generated and digitally altered content. This is an issue that Zurich Legal called "one of the most urgent child-protection challenges of our time."

The collaboration underscored the significant role Dentons can play in connecting clients, nonprofit organizations and legal professionals around a common purpose. By leveraging our global platform, project management capabilities and longstanding relationships, we create opportunities for clients to engage in meaningful pro bono service while helping organizations like ECPAT advance critical child protection initiatives around the world.

Working together on matters of shared purpose fosters trust, goodwill and a deeper understanding of one another's values. We are proud to continue building on our relationships with clients to deliver high-impact pro bono service that benefits communities around the world while creating meaningful connections among those committed to making a difference.

"On behalf of Zurich Legal, thank you for your outstanding partnership and leadership in supporting our inaugural Global Pro Bono Day and the associated research sprint. This was a milestone moment for our legal community, with one global team coming together across regions, and Dentons' collaboration made that ambition operational, structured and impactful."

— Zurich Legal

Strengthening Missions Through Legal Research

With the encouragement of Dentons' Jewish Affinity Group, Dentons began partnering with **StandWithUs** in 2025 to support the organization's efforts to combat antisemitism through research and advocacy. Lawyers and professionals across multiple offices have contributed to a range of projects, most recently a research initiative led by Atlanta associate Alana Gutierrez Torres with support from New York-based counsel Stephanie Abrutyn examining legal protections for wearing religious garb and symbols, including looking specifically at how courts and agencies assess such rights when a particular garment carries a variety of meanings and can be associated with religious, cultural or political expression. The resulting analysis earned high praise from the organization as "exceptional and phenomenal" and was so impactful that StandWithUs plans to use it as the foundation for staff training resources. Through this work, Dentons is helping equip a leading nonprofit with practical tools to advance education, awareness and protection against discrimination.

Dentons Pro Bono Honor Roll

Dentons US launched the Pro Bono Honor Roll in late 2025 to recognize lawyers and business services professionals whose extraordinary dedication helps expand access to justice and improve lives in the communities in which we live and work.

The inaugural Honor Roll recognized 113 lawyers who contributed 50 or more hours of pro bono service in 2025, along with 25 business services professionals whose support strengthens and sustains this important work. Together, these honorees—representing every Dentons US office—reflect a firmwide culture of service and demonstrate the profound impact that can be achieved when professional experience is paired with compassion and a commitment to meaningful change. To view our inaugural list of honorees, [click here](#).



113

Lawyers



50+

Pro Bono
Hours Each



25

Business
Services
Professionals

Pro Bono Stars

Dentons is proud to celebrate the exceptional contributions of our people who go above and beyond in their commitment to Pro Bono. Their work helps advance justice, strengthen communities and create lasting change.

- ☆ Dentons was honored by the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) with a 2026 **Beacon of Justice Award**, marking the third consecutive year the Firm has received this recognition. The award recognizes members of the pro bono legal community who are advancing equal justice. This year's honorees were selected for work that aligns with the theme "Protecting Democracy and Civil Rights."
- ☆ Dentons was also named to the Public Interest Law Initiative's (PILI) 2026 **Pro Bono Recognition Roster**, which honors law firms and corporations that have made significant commitments and contributions to pro bono work throughout the state of Illinois. The Firm also sponsored PILI's Annual Pro Bono Reception.
- ☆ Dentons was honored as the 2026 **Community Impact Legacy Builder** by Legacy Charter School in recognition of the Firm's long-standing partnership and commitment to supporting scholars through mentorship, volunteerism, mock trial, career days, cultural fairs and firmwide fundraising initiatives.
- ☆ Dentons received a **certificate from the Hawai'i House of Representatives** in recognition of the Honolulu office's pro bono work for low-income, self-represented litigants at the Honolulu District Court Access to Justice Room.



Samantha Siegien
Senior Managing Associate, Chicago



Brian Bagott
Partner, Kansas City



Robert E. Richards
Partner, Chicago

The TMA Chicago/Midwest Chapter recognized Dentons with its **Pro Bono Project of the Year Award** for work supporting Luster Learning Institute, NFP, which operates Calm Classroom. Dentons helped the nonprofit navigate liquidity constraints and evaluate restructuring alternatives, working alongside turnaround consultants to help stabilize cash flow and keep the organization operating.



Claire Wong Black
Partner, Honolulu

Claire has been honored with the **John P. Frank Award** by the Ninth Circuit Advisory Board for demonstrating outstanding character and integrity, dedication to the rule of law, trial and appellate excellence and collegiality among members of the bench and bar, and a lifetime of service to the federal courts of the Ninth Circuit. Claire is the first person from Hawai'i to receive the John P. Frank Award and only the third woman to earn the distinction since it was established more than two decades ago.



Shannon Shin
Partner, Chicago



Natalie Spears
Partner, Chicago



Peter Garthwaite
Managing Associate, Chicago

Shannon, Natalie and Peter are among this year's recipients of the Northern District of Illinois **Awards for Excellence in Pro Bono and Public Interest Service**. They were recognized for their dedication to pro bono work and for securing a favorable settlement through the court's mediation program on behalf of a former inmate who was the victim of a prison assault.



Shalin Shah
Associate, Washington, DC



Sean Kirwin
Partner, Atlanta



Shari Klevens
Partner, Atlanta

Shalin, Sean and Shari were honored as **Volunteers of the Year** by Legal Aid Chicago for securing a successful appeal on behalf of a domestic violence survivor whose request for an order of protection had initially been denied.



Bill Hunt
Partner, Honolulu

Hawai'i Gov. Josh Green has presented Bill with an **Outstanding Pro Bono Attorney award**, recognizing Hunt's contributions to the Hawai'i Access to Justice Commission and his service as president of the Hawaii Justice Foundation.



Lyndsey Wajert
Managing Associate, Chicago

The National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) honored Lyndsey at its 27th Annual Human Rights Awards, where she received the **Rising Star Award** in recognition of her outstanding commitment to advancing justice and her dedicated pro bono advocacy on behalf of clients.



Melissa Sarsten Polito
Managing Associate, Short Hills

Melissa was featured in Volunteer Lawyers for Justice's "**Volunteer Voices**" series, recognizing her outstanding commitment to pro bono service and the meaningful impact of her work in advancing access to justice.



Benjamin C. Weinberg
Pro Bono Partner

Ben was honored with the NLADA **Exemplar Award**, recognizing his contributions to pro bono and public service.

In 2025, Ben was awarded the **Champion of Justice** award by Legal Aid Chicago.

ABOUT DENTONS

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