

20 Firms Show How To Win Big And Do Good

By Lisa Ryan

Law360, New York (August 21, 2015, 7:11 PM ET) -- Twenty law firms showed the same passion for taking on hard cases and scoring victories in pro bono matters as they displayed for corporate clients over the past year, while also dedicating a large number of hours to those in need, earning them a spot among Law360's Pro Bono Firms of 2015.

Law360's sixth annual pro bono series not only honors firms that donated their time and resources to important causes, from fighting family immigrant detention to advocating for marriage equality, but also overcame hurdles to nab major wins on behalf of their clients between June 1, 2014, and June 1, 2015. Each of the honored firms approached its pro bono cases with the same vigor as the cases that bring in the big bucks.

For instance, the same year Hogan Lovells helped guide a \$326 million transaction for cloud services companies, the firm also nabbed a landmark pro bono victory for whistleblowers in the U.S. Supreme Court in January. Similarly, Morrison & Foerster LLP won an interlocutory ruling in the Supreme Court that restored access to abortion for women in Texas in October, shortly after helping UBS Financial Services Inc. escape a \$113 million mortgage-backed securities suit.

The Pro Bono Firms of 2015 are:

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
Arnold & Porter LLP
Chadbourne & Parke LLP
Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP
Covington & Burling LLP
Debevoise & Plimpton LLP
Dechert LLP
Gibson Dunn
Hogan Lovells
Keker & Van Nest LLP
Kirkland & Ellis LLP
McDermott Will & Emery LLP
Milbank Tweed Hadley & McCloy LLP
Morrison & Foerster LLP
Munger Tolles & Olson LLP
O'Melveny & Myers LLP

Paul Hastings LLP
Robins Kaplan LLP
Sullivan & Cromwell LLP
WilmerHale

Collectively, these notable firms logged an average of 96.55 hours per lawyer over the 12-month period. The number was actually a dip from last year's impressive average of 107.2 hours for the winning firms, the average of 98.7 hours in 2013 and 104 hours in 2012. Ten firms broke the 100-hour average, down from 13 firms the previous year.

"The data shows that it's been relatively flat in terms of total hours, but firms are continuing to make substantial commitments to pro bono work and really look at ways that their pro bono work can have the maximum impact possible," said Steven H. Schulman, a pro bono partner at Akin Gump and former president of the Association of Pro Bono Counsel.

Debevoise & Plimpton led this year's pack of Pro Bono firms with an average of 123 hours per attorney, while Arnold & Porter trailed close behind with 119 hours and WilmerHale and Gibson Dunn were tied for third at 109 hours per attorney.

Despite the slight decline in average pro bono hours, Schulman said firms are continuing to try to help those in need as much as possible. He noted that he's also seen an uptick in firms working with their would-be competitors on a number of important matters.

"One of the very important developments in the last few years has been firms really looking to where they can have the greatest impact and then collaborating among each other," Schulman said.

Firms have worked with their peers on matters relating to domestic violence, seeking to protect women and children and find suitable support systems for these victims, Schulman added.

"The constant effort to provide more legal services to low-income people who cannot afford them has generated new collaboration amongst law firms, especially driven by the Association of Pro Bono Counsel initiatives that are taking place across the country," Jennifer Brown, senior pro bono counsel at Morrison & Foerster LLP, said.

According to Brown, there has also been a rise in firms working with nonprofit organizations on pro bono issues.

"Public interest legal organizations are increasingly recognizing the value that large law firms can bring to their cases, so groups like the American Civil Liberties Union or the Center for Reproductive Rights more and more, when contemplating significant impact litigation, are actively looking for law firm partners," Brown said.

This past year, for example, MoFo worked with the Kenya Human Rights Commission to submit an amicus brief highlighting legal precedents from other countries recognizing the rights of intersex people. The firm was able to help the High Court of Kenya issue a landmark decision ordering the government to develop policies protecting the rights of those born with male and female sexual characteristics.

Similarly, Dechert LLP worked with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law to create access to voting on a remote Native American reservation in South Dakota. WilmerHale also

collaborated with the Center for Death Penalty Litigation to help a man wrongly convicted of the rape and murder of a child be granted a pardon of innocence by the North Carolina governor.

Firms with strong pro bono practices have dedicated resources this year to help immigrant families, including children, that have been detained, according to Joseph Genova, director of public service at Milbank.

“The need is so dramatic. When lawyers are confronted with stories about literally tens of thousands of children incarcerated after crossing the border, they are motivated to help in any way they can,” Genova said.

Akin Gump joined forces with a number of organizations to form the Karnes City Immigrant Family Pro Bono Project to respond to the immigrant family detention crisis in late August 2014, providing representation to families incarcerated in Karnes City, Texas, and seeking asylum in the U.S. In the same vein, Kecker & Van Nest secured a victory in a class action in California, leading to an essential blocking of mandatory detention in the state.

As firms expand across the globe — opening offices right, left and center — there will also be an uptick in international pro bono cases being done by U.S.-based firms, according to Genova.

“We’re seeing a lot more growth being done internationally than we did many years ago,” Genova said. “Firms like ours with offices in many different countries have found opportunities there [for pro bono work].”

Firms are also continuing to take on tough cases, such as Munger Tolles’ work protecting the rights of protesters in Ferguson, Missouri. According to Schulman, pro bono attorneys will keep on seeking out these potentially controversial cases, providing services when they see an immediate need.

“Sure there are areas where firms may decide as a matter of policy not to touch, but for the most part, firms are very willing to delve into all sorts of areas and advocate for social change,” Schulman said.

--Additional reporting by Jess Davis and Linda Chiem. Editing by Chris Yates and Mark Lebetkin.