



# PRO BONO NATION: UNITING FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE

2024 DUANE MORRIS PRO BONO REPORT



“Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

– DESMOND TUTU

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Our 2024 Annual Report, *Pro Bono Nation*, encapsulates a global movement of individuals, organizations and communities coming together to provide pro bono services for the public good. Our commitment to pro bono work is rooted in a deep belief that everyone deserves access to justice regardless of economic resources or standing. Pro bono service represents the very best of what we can achieve when we unite to address the challenges facing our society.

Within these pages, you will find stories that illustrate the collective efforts of Duane Morris attorneys, staff, clients and other stakeholders and the tangible impacts they’ve had on the lives of countless individuals. From legal advocacy to healthcare support, educational initiatives to environmental preservation, immigration to criminal justice reform, the work highlighted here showcases the transformative power of pro bono service.

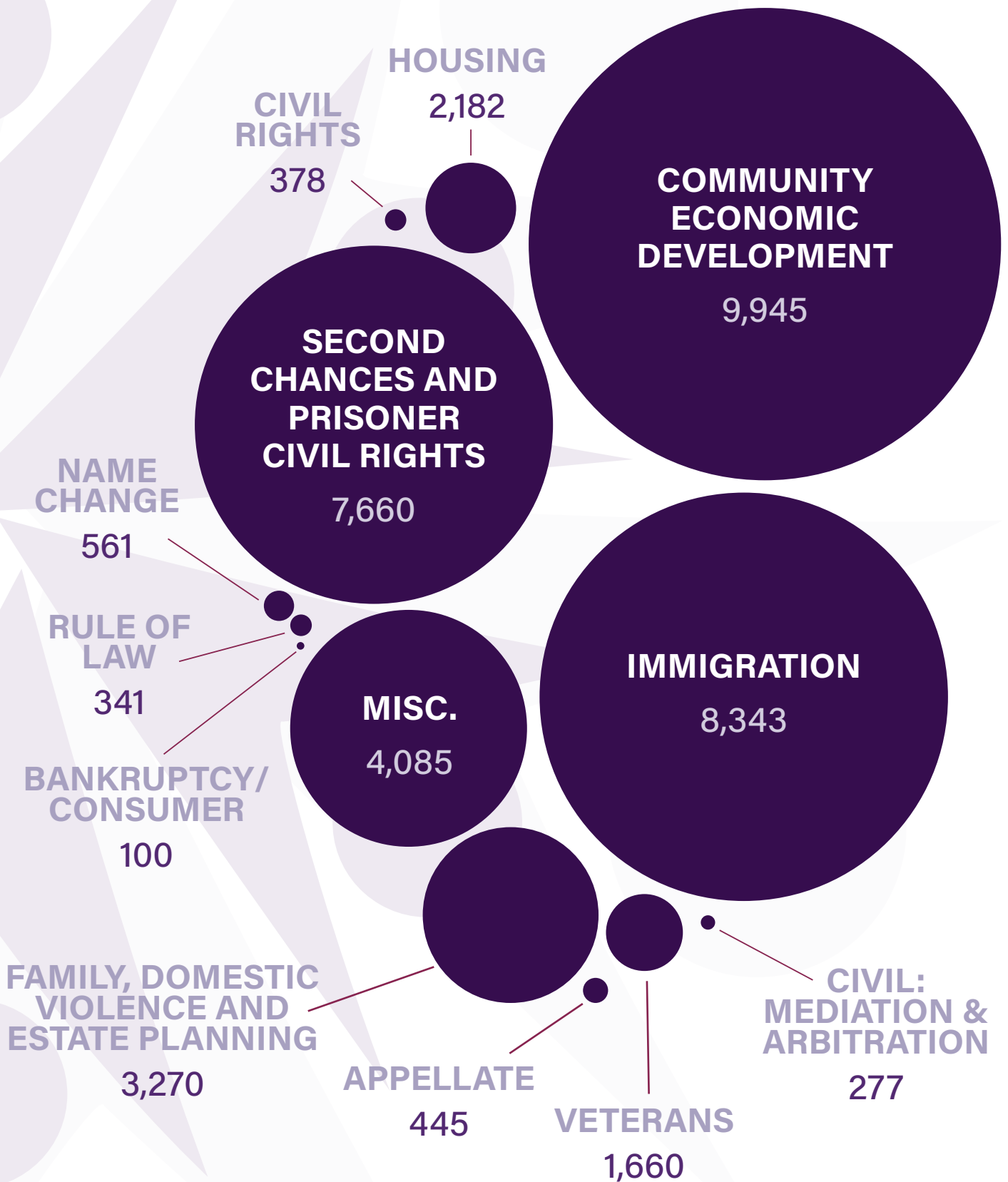
*Pro Bono Nation* is more than a concept – it is a call to action. It challenges each of us to reflect on how we can use our skills, our time and our resources to make a difference. It reminds us that we each have a role to play in the strengthening of our communities, and that by working together, we can achieve far more than we ever could alone.

As you read through this report, I hope you feel inspired by our stories and consider how you, too, can contribute to this growing movement. Together, we can build a stronger, more equitable and more compassionate nation and world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew A. Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M".

**MATTHEW A. TAYLOR**  
Chairman and CEO

# PRO BONO HOURS BY THE NUMBERS





# DUANE MORRIS PRO BONO ACCOLADES

## 2024 DUANE MORRIS PRO BONO LEADERSHIP AWARD

The Duane Morris Pro Bono Leadership Award is given to an attorney who exemplifies the spirit of pro bono: a selfless, longstanding and unwavering commitment to pro bono service; a leader by example, who accepts pro bono matters without fanfare; and a pro bono contributor who encourages and mentors other firm attorneys in pro bono service. For the first time in the award's history, Duane Morris celebrated two winners in 2024 - marking a litigation leader and a transactional leader.



**ERIC BRESLIN** (Partner, North Jersey, Trial): Over the past 10 years, Eric has donated **over 3,000 pro bono hours** to indigent defendants, prisoners and wrongly accused individuals, averaging 350 pro bono hours annually. Through each of these matters, he provided invaluable mentoring and first chair trial experience to numerous associates. Presently, Eric is working with the **Civil Rights and**

**Restoration Project at Northeastern School of Law** to obtain a posthumous pardon for a gentleman who was wrongly sentenced to death under inequitable Jim Crow-era sentencing laws. There is strong evidence our client actually was innocent of the crime.



**LISA MERRILL** (Special Counsel, San Diego, Corporate): During her time at Duane Morris, Lisa assisted **over 277 nonprofits, totaling nearly 900 pro bono hours**. Year after year, Lisa worked tirelessly, assisting organizations to incorporate as nonprofits, apply for IRS Section 501(c)(3) tax exempt status, and advised on other corporate governance/tax matters. Retired in December

2024, Lisa never declined to assist, even if she was just offering a quick call or supervising an associate, which she did on most of her matters. Some of Lisa's more notable clients included the **King Center, Choral Club of San Diego, The New Normal** and **Sail to Shelter**, among others.

## 2024 DUANE MORRIS PRO BONO AWARD

The Duane Morris Pro Bono Award honors the outstanding service of an attorney or group that exemplifies Duane Morris' commitment to pro bono service and has made a significant impact on an individual or community.



**ANNA WILLS** (Associate, Philadelphia, Real Estate) was celebrated for her work representing **Tree House Books** in acquiring ownership of their properties (previously rented), obtaining financing to renovate the properties, and applying for the requisite zoning permits and variances. A giving library and literacy center in North Philadelphia, Tree House Books has a dual purpose: to provide free books to the community and spread knowledge and awareness. Tree House Books also leads out-of-school-time programs that increase literacy skills and promote a lifelong love of reading and writing in children. In the past year, Tree House Books serviced over 10,000 members, including nearly 2,000 new members, and distributed nearly 100,000 books; they held 50 book drives.



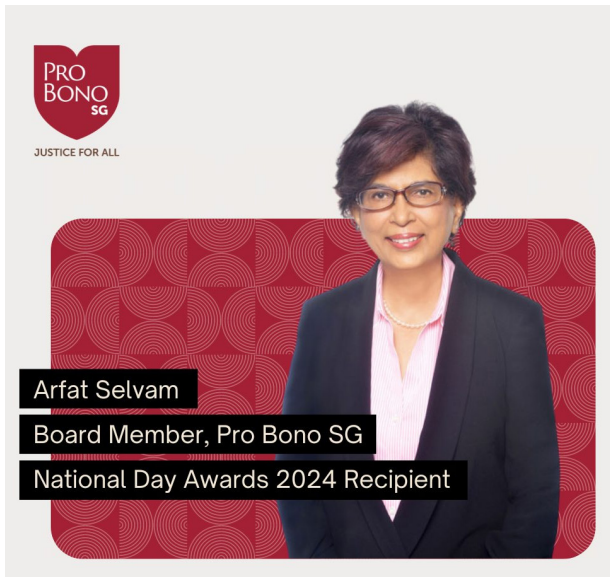
Tree House Books now owns their property in North Philadelphia and has renovation plans as depicted in this artist's rendering.



Duane Morris was honored with the **Women in Business Law Pro Bono North America Firm of the Year Award** in celebration of the firm’s progressive and innovative pro bono and social engagement efforts advancing women and gender diversity.



**ARFAT SELVAM**, (Managing Director, Duane Morris & Selvam LLP, Singapore) was awarded Singapore’s **Public Service Medal** by Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on Singapore’s National Day. The medal honors a person who has rendered commendable public service in Singapore. Arfat was recognized for her more than 17 years of pro bono legal service.



**PHILIP MATTHEWS** (Of Counsel, San Francisco, Trial) was celebrated as a **“Distinguished Citizen”** by the **Boy Scouts of America Pacific Skyline Council** in recognition of his pro bono service navigating bankruptcy proceedings and negotiating a conservation easement that will preserve redwoods on a 300-acre property owned by the Boy Scouts and facilitate repairs following the 2020 California forest fires. Philip also was honored for his considerable pro bono service representing Afghans seeking asylum and safety in the United States as well as his work with the Episcopal Charities of the Diocese of California, University of California Hastings College of Law and Project Concern International.



**ALVIN LODISH** (Partner, Miami, Trial) was honored with the **Florida Bar President’s Pro Bono Service Award**, presented by the Florida Supreme Court in gratitude for decades of pro bono service as a guardian ad litem on behalf of children via Dade Legal Aid’s Children’s Legal Collaborative.





# PRO BONO NATION: UNITED KINGDOM



**Duane Morris' London office was ranked third in the International AmLaw Pro Bono Ranking based on the office's average hours per lawyer and percentage of lawyers performing 20-plus pro bono hours annually.** One hundred percent of lawyers engaged in pro bono work, with over 65 percent performing more than 20 hours and averaging nearly 70 hours per lawyer. The office's work was varied, including many of the firm's priority areas such as supporting veterans, microentrepreneurs, women's rights and more.

The London office is home to 19 lawyers. Its primary areas of practice include information technology and telecommunications, employment, construction and engineering, real estate, mergers and acquisitions, commercial, capital markets, banking and finance, and litigation.

## UPLIFTING DIVERSE VOICES

**SoHo House Foundation** empowers creatives from underrepresented and lower socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure they may pursue their work professionally and that their voices are reflected in art that is produced. London attorneys initially helped form the foundation several years ago and continue to provide assistance on employment advice as well as corporate governance matters.

**The Marie Colvin Journalists' Network** offers an online community for women journalists in the Middle East and North Africa, affording mentorship, professional advice and access to resources and networking opportunities. The organization was formed after the death of Marie Colvin, a world-renowned war correspondent killed in the line of duty, to address the increased risk and threats faced by women journalists covering armed conflict. Duane Morris assisted the organization in crafting a safeguarding policy.

## SUPPORTING MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

**The Allied Forces Foundation** unites wounded, ill and injured servicepeople and veterans from the United States, United Kingdom and allied nations on their journey to recovery. Through a series of outdoor, peer-led events that challenge the mind and body, the foundation provides opportunities that reinvigorate the spirit of comradeship and teamwork and instill a renewed sense of purpose.

**Rock2Recovery** similarly seeks to serve veterans in distress by proactively providing counseling, coaching, a helpline and more to members of the armed forces, emergency personnel and their immediate family members.

Duane Morris attorneys across the U.K. and U.S. are honored to advise the Allied Forces Foundation and Rock2Recovery on various areas of corporate governance and employment law.

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“ At Duane Morris London, we recognize that pro bono work is essential to fostering a fairer, more equitable society. Beyond fulfilling our professional responsibility, engaging in pro bono allows our lawyers to sharpen their skills while supporting charities working to uplift vulnerable communities. As a firm deeply rooted in diverse industries and committed to excellence, we believe that contributing our skills through pro bono strengthens both our practice and the broader community. It’s a vital part of how we demonstrate our values in action. ”



Nic Hart,  
Managing Partner



# PRO BONO NATION: CALIFORNIA



**Our California offices provided more than 5,100 pro bono hours in the past year.**

Attorneys in Duane Morris offices in San Diego, Los Angeles, Silicon Valley and San Francisco provide a breadth of services to an array of companies, public entities and individuals. With longstanding ties to both the legal and business communities, the offices serve as a base for Duane Morris to serve its clients, not only from Southern California to the Bay Area, but also throughout Northern California, the Pacific Northwest and Pacific Rim nations, and the western United States. The offices provide comprehensive legal services, leading in intellectual property, patent, trademark and trade secrets, and from white-collar and complex litigations to insurance, business reorganization, financial restructuring and employment law.

## **FIGHTING FOR HIV-STATUS DECRIMINALIZATION**

Twenty-nine American states criminalize otherwise lawful conduct or impose harsher penalties for crimes when committed by persons living with HIV. Many of these laws were passed when the mechanisms of HIV transmission were unknown and there were no effective medical treatments to prevent the transmission and progression of the disease. Today, HIV transmission is well understood and preventable with modern medications. For people living with HIV, current antiviral regimens render HIV a chronic yet non-life-threatening disease.

In partnership with **Gilead Sciences**, the **Center for HIV Law and Policy** and the **Williams Institute**, Duane Morris co-sponsored a continuing legal education lecture (CLE) focused on medical advances in antiviral and other therapies for preventing and treating HIV. Lawyers gained insight into the ongoing stigma and criminalization of HIV status, its harmful impact on communities and efforts to decriminalize HIV status.

Building on the CLE, Duane Morris and Gilead launched a pro bono project combatting HIV criminalization. In some states, persons living with HIV who are convicted of a crime must register on the sex offender registry, even if the crime was

not a sexual offense. Registration as a sex offender places vast limitations on registrants, creating barriers on where these individuals can live, work and be lawfully present.

Duane Morris and Gilead attorneys teamed up to help individuals living with HIV petition for removal from sex offender registries and also researched model pleadings and motions to support public defenders representing people criminalized for living with HIV.

### REVIVING A LEGACY: REOPENING AND TRANSFORMING THE COMPTON PAR 3

Situated in the vibrant heart of Los Angeles, the Compton Par 3 Golf Course was a symbol of hope and opportunity within the minority community. It was a place where dreams took root, friendships were formed and futures were shaped, providing a place for golfers of all ages and skill levels to play. Despite its historical significance and community impact, the Compton Par 3 closed three years ago due to financial issues.

Led by renowned golf coach and mentor Christopher Staples, the **Compton Country Club Initiative (CCCI)** seeks to revitalize and reopen the Compton Par 3, restoring this treasured asset to the community. In doing so, CCCI strives to offer affordable golf, foster community and provide educational support. Duane Morris Corporate lawyers are representing CCCI in forming as a business entity in California, negotiating a lease agreement for the land and other corporate governance/startup matters.

### BOZ INSTITUTE: THE NEXT GENERATION OF SCIENTISTS

**The Boz Life Science Research and Teaching Institute** offers an immersive research program where pre-college and college students work alongside researchers on cutting-edge projects in neurobiology, genomics, evolutionary biology and more. This hands-on experience sparks curiosity and inspires young scholars to pursue careers in life sciences, driving positive change both locally and globally. For several years, Duane Morris attorneys have helped power this collaboration by negotiating a master services agreement, advising on employment agreements and safeguarding intellectual property.

### CHURCH TRIUMPHS IN EMINENT DOMAIN CASE WITH PRO BONO SUPPORT

After a fire destroyed our client's church, Humboldt County placed a \$90,000 lien for nuisance abatement because the church could not afford to clean up the property. Subsequently, the Southern Humboldt Community Healthcare District filed an eminent domain suit to take the property and build a parking lot for a nearby hospital. The county also joined the suit to collect the amount owed on the lien. At the request of the **Institute for Justice**, Duane Morris construction attorneys volunteered to represent the church pro bono. After months of litigation and negotiations, including working with expert appraisers, the attorneys reached a settlement agreement netting the church nearly \$135,000. A major victory for our client totaling more than the county's initial valuation, the interest liens also were forgiven.

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”  
– ANNE FRANK





# PRO BONO NATION: TEXAS



**Our Texas offices provided over 3,000 pro bono service hours in the past year.**

Duane Morris attorneys have longstanding ties to the Texas legal and business communities and have been practicing law in the state for many years. The firm's Texas offices align Duane Morris' domestic footprint with the robust high-technology and energy sectors in Texas. Duane Morris has been increasing its focus and investment in Texas for more than two decades, and now has a critical mass of legal talent and a footprint in key markets, including Houston, Austin, Dallas and Fort Worth. Duane Morris' Corporate, Trial and IP Practice Groups represent a large client base in Texas, and its interdisciplinary, industry-sector approach to legal services enables it to deliver additional value to clients ranging from entrepreneurs to Fortune 500 firms, whether they operate in the high tech, financial, energy, transportation or healthcare industries.



# SPOTLIGHT: RISING TO THE CHALLENGE AND TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

## ATTORNEYS SECURE HAGUE CONVENTION VICTORY FOR VENEZUELAN MOM AND DAUGHTER

Our clients, a mother and her 5-year-old daughter, fled economic and political unrest in Venezuela seeking safety in the United States. Nearly two years later, the child's father sought the child's return to his mother (the child's paternal grandmother) in Venezuela who has no custody rights. The father lives in Spain. A team of Trial associates successfully secured a defensive victory under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction before the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas. Finding that our client successfully demonstrated her daughter is well settled in Dallas, a notoriously difficult defense to prove, the court held it is in the daughter's best interest to remain with her mother.

Beyond the legal victory, the case was remarkable as it was all of the associates' first federal trial. Here, the team made up of **JOAKIM SOEDERBAUM**, **RAMSEY SCHULTZ** and **LEXIE HARALSON** discuss the professional development opportunities afforded via pro bono.



### Ramsey, tell us about the case. What went into the preparations?

**RAMSEY:** I was given the opportunity to give my first opening in a trial as well as examine witnesses. Lexie also examined several witnesses, and Joakim took the closing argument. These opportunities involved a chance to develop a case, prepare and examine witnesses and clients from Spanish-speaking countries with the language fluency I spent my childhood and adult career developing, apply my experience in international law and juvenile justice, and establish relationships with our clients.

### Joakim, how did collaborating with attorneys and clients during the trial shape your understanding of teamwork in litigation?

**JOAKIM:** Teamwork is the reason we obtained the fantastic, but difficult, outcome we did in this case. The supervising partner entrusted me to take the lead of what we internally began referring to as the "Dream Team" because we all

worked so well together and were equally passionate about supporting our client's dream.

With her support, I was able to not only first chair, but also lead my team to victory in my first federal trial. I learned so much about everything that goes into preparing a case for trial and about having to make strategic decisions on my feet along the way. There is no doubt in my mind that we obtained the result we did because we treated and approached every single task with utmost importance.

### What strategies or approaches will you take into future trials based on this experience?

**LEXIE:** Preparation is always the key to success. We were the better prepared team, and that is how we earned the result for the client. Also, now I even more appreciate that however long you think something takes, plan for it to take three times as long.

**JOAKIM:** This case was unique in many ways, but one broader concept that stuck with me is the "big picture." As a young associate, I was once told to "keep your eye on the prize," and I think that was very true in this case. We had things such as extensive discovery disputes consume quite a bit of attention and resources – but at the end of the day, we looked past those and focused on what would likely be the best way to accomplish our goal and the best path to get there. In doing that, even though we were representing the respondent, we were effectively able to make the other side address multiple peripheral points at trial while we focused on our strongest points.

### What are some lasting impacts from the case?

**JOAKIM:** Everything we did in this case we did well aware of two things. First, the odds were stacked against us. Second, the outcome could have a life-changing impact on a 5-year-old girl. It became obvious during trial that we had outworked the other side and that we had turned our client's cause into our collective cause. Two months later, we learned our hard work and passion helped us overcome the odds, and we got to share wonderful news with our client. That feeling will stick with me forever.

**RAMSEY:** As attorneys, we spend countless hours (in this case, hundreds) advocating for clients in any way we can. The reality of preparing a case can be, in actuality, daunting. "Advocating" turns into late nights, long calls, document review, email chains, filings and disputes that seem to have no end in sight.

To witness the results of those efforts come together through the "final" presentation of a matter in front of the court was to be reminded of the true purpose of that advocating. It reminded us of the "why" behind what we, as attorneys, do each day.

**LEXIE:** What we do does change lives. I would tell other associates to remember why we all wanted to be lawyers.

# PRO BONO NATION: PENNSYLVANIA



## **Our Pennsylvania offices provided nearly 11,000 pro bono hours in the past year.**

Duane Morris continues to be an important part of the foundation of the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh legal communities. Philadelphia, the city of the firm's founding more than a century ago, is now its present-day headquarters. Hundreds of attorneys from Duane Morris' Pennsylvania offices work with each other and colleagues in other cities to provide a comprehensive array of legal services to clients ranging from Fortune 500 companies to small entrepreneurial ventures and from public entities to individuals. Attorneys practice in all of the firm's areas and industries, from complex commercial litigations involving antitrust, trade secrets or construction law to real estate transactions, mergers and tax law, as well as health, employment and intellectual property law. Across the commonwealth, attorneys bridge the gap in providing access to justice.





## PURSUING PREGNANCY JUSTICE

In October 2023, our client sought medical care in connection with pregnancy complications. The personal tragedy of a stillbirth quickly turned into a legal nightmare. She was taken into custody by a detective in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and interrogated. That detective and the Schuylkill County district attorney obtained our client's medical records using subpoenas not authorized by Pennsylvania law. On the eve of the district attorney's unsuccessful bid for a seat on the Court of Common Pleas, he charged our client with half a dozen criminal counts arising from her alleged fentanyl use, including murder of her unborn child. Our client was held without bail pending trial, creating an urgent need for an aggressive defense strategy. Working in collaboration with the **Women's Law Project** and leading toxicologists, Duane Morris criminal defense attorneys jumped in, defending these disturbing charges that victimized our client. In June 2024, after Duane Morris demonstrated the lack of legal (or medical) basis for these charges, the commonwealth agreed to dismiss all of the charges with prejudice, and our client pled no contest to simple possession of a controlled substance.

## PROVIDING LEGAL SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT ACROSS MEDTECH SUPPLY CHAIN

**The Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council** (SPLC) is a small but mighty nonprofit that works toward a future where medical technology procurement is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable by bringing together a community of some of the world's largest purchasers, suppliers, advocates and experts who are dedicated to driving sustainable and positive impact through the power of procurement.

As part of its efforts, SPLC manages the Collective Healthcare Action for Reducing MedTech Emissions (CHARME) initiative, which convenes health systems, medical device and equipment suppliers, distributors, GPOs and other key industry stakeholders to champion best practices in reducing emissions across the medtech supply chain. Working collaboratively, CHARME members seek to implement a road map for near-term efforts to decarbonize the medtech value chain, including by driving renewable energy, decarbonizing medtech products across the life cycle, clinical education and engagement, and optimizing transportation/logistics to minimize less-than-truckload, overnight and last-mile deliveries, while ensuring the availability of critical supplies.

Jumping in to do our part toward medtech sustainability, Duane Morris attorneys advise SPLC on CHARME's governing structure and documents as well as their collaboration efforts to drive sector-specific sustainable solutions.

“The criminalization of pregnancy is a grave injustice that disproportionately harms vulnerable women, especially those from marginalized communities. The need for pro bono support has never been more critical. Legal professionals have a unique opportunity to stand with us and provide essential representation to those who otherwise would have none.”

– SUE FRIETSCH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WOMEN'S LAW PROJECT



## HOUSING JUSTICE: RECLAIMING CHILDHOOD HOME FOR DISABLED SENIOR IN PROPERTY DISPUTE SAGA

Our client is a disabled senior citizen with limited income who inherited the childhood home she literally was born in. Hoping to earn some extra cash, our client rented out the home to a couple. Sadly, the couple turned out to be nightmare tenants. In addition to extensively damaging the home, the tenants refused to pay rent or leave when the lease expired. Duane Morris Trial and Employment litigators stepped in to assist in negotiating a settlement with the tenants, who also were represented by pro bono counsel. A deal was made, but at the last minute in Philadelphia Municipal Court, the tenants refused to sign. As a result, our attorneys took the case to trial that same day and obtained a full order for back rent and possession of the property.

The tenants appealed to the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, and over the course of nine months, the case went into default twice. At first, the court reopened the initial default to give the tenants a second chance. After the second default, the court granted possession to our client and awarded a larger back rent amount.

However, the tenants still refused to vacate. Despite multiple opportunities to leave the property peacefully, including a court-granted extension for the eviction, our attorneys ultimately had to involve the Philadelphia Sheriff's Department to physically evict the tenants. Then, because the tenants left all of their things in the house, they broke back into the property and threatened the client, requiring further police involvement.

Today, the tenants are finally gone because of Duane Morris' zealous advocacy! Our client is beginning to repair the property with hopes of moving in and spending her final years in the home.

## PROTECTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN: ADVOCATING FOR FAMILY COURT'S ROLE IN SPECIAL IMMIGRANT JUVENILE STATUS CASES

Special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS) allows children who have been abused, abandoned or neglected by one or both parents to remain in the U.S. and seek permanent residency if returning to their home country is not in their best interest. It involves two steps: a family court custody determination and finding of best interests, and then, a visa application to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

A dispute arose in Pennsylvania about whether family courts could make the predicate best interest findings where a child was abandoned, abused or neglected by only one parent while the other parent remained in the child's life. In *Velasquez v. Miranda*, Licely Juarez Velasquez sought sole custody of her children and the necessary SIJS findings based on allegations of abuse, abandonment and neglect by the children's father who resided in Guatemala. Delaware County Family Court granted Velasquez sole legal and physical custody, but declined to make the necessary SIJS findings because the children had not been adjudicated legally dependent.

Representing **HIAS Pennsylvania** and several law professors as amici before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Duane Morris Appellate attorneys successfully advocated that family courts are the appropriate forum - and indeed the only forum as proscribed by state law - for making factual findings about a minor child's best interests, irrespective of whether the child may be residing with one parent or adjudicated legally dependent.

Citing the firm's brief, the Supreme Court agreed, emphasizing that family courts are responsible for making factual determinations and predicate findings for SIJS. The court emphatically affirmed that the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act's 2008 amendments clarified that SIJS petitioners need not be eligible for foster care and may be reunified with one parent. Not to mention, federal statutes and regulations do not restrict the type of court that may issue a qualifying SIJS order so long as the court has jurisdiction over dependency or custody matters. A case of first impression and a technical ruling, the decision will protect thousands of minor children across the commonwealth who entered the U.S. as unaccompanied minors and seek protection in the United States.

## PRO BONO FUTURE: SPONSORING EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS FELLOWS

Founded by law students, **Equal Justice Works** brings together an extensive network of law students, lawyers, legal services organizations and supporters to promote a lifelong commitment to public service and equal justice.

In 2022, Duane Morris, in collaboration with Comcast, proudly sponsored the firm's first Equal Justice Works fellow, a two-year fellowship aimed at increasing equal access to justice for communities in need. **MORIAH MENDICINO**, an urban educator turned public interest lawyer, joined **Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity** (PLSE) to create pardon projects for criminal record clearing in Philadelphia's low-income/high-crime neighborhoods. On concluding her fellowship this summer, Mendicino was hired full time with PLSE to continue her important work.



This fall, Duane Morris and Comcast sponsored our second Equal Justice Works fellow, **BRIAN THOMAS**, a recent graduate of University of Pennsylvania Law School. Thomas joins **Disability Rights Pennsylvania** working to expand access to education and mental healthcare for children with disabilities in Philadelphia's juvenile justice system, advocating for more community-based alternatives to detention and helping increase graduation rates and economic opportunities.

## A LEGACY OF SERVICE: DUANE MORRIS ALUMNI GIVE BACK

*Duane Morris Alumni Give Back formally connects, activates and encourages alumni globally to team up with current firm attorneys through its Pro Bono Program, including attending public interest CLEs and legal clinic volunteer opportunities.*



After transitioning to of counsel in 2020, **TERESA CAVENAGH** jumped into pro bono during the COVID-19 pandemic by volunteering as a mediator for Philadelphia's Eviction Diversion Program. In a city where 48 percent of residents are renters, the compulsory, good-faith program was a response to the pandemic era eviction crisis. Mediators help landlords and tenants craft workable payment plans, thus avoiding costly court processes and evictions and preventing homelessness. Since 2020, Teresa has mediated disputes between landlords and tenants; she has mediated over 1,100 disputes, including more than 250 mediations in 2024 alone.

A longtime partner in the firm's Trial Practice Group, Teresa began working at the firm in 1976 as a law librarian. She transitioned to an attorney in 1985 and became a partner in 1995. Throughout her career, Teresa was an active pro bono volunteer, advising hundreds of seniors across the commonwealth via the Pennsylvania SeniorLAW Hotline, helping immigrants naturalize as U.S. citizens as well as volunteering with Women's Way, and serving on the SeniorLAW Center's board of directors for more than a decade. For her efforts, Teresa also was inducted into SeniorLAW Center Hall of Fame in May 2021.

**“I am happy to give my time to this critical project and help Philadelphia residents to stay in their homes and avoid the life-altering consequences of an eviction on their record. It has also enabled me to learn a new skill and it keeps me engaged, which I appreciate.”**

– TERESA CAVENAGH

# PRO BONO NATION:

## FROM OPPRESSION TO FREEDOM: A CHADIAN ACTIVIST'S JOURNEY TO ASYLUM AND NEW BEGINNINGS



For over three decades, Idriss Déby ruled Chad with an iron fist, entrenching a regime marked by deep-seated corruption and widespread human rights abuses. Elections were little more than a façade, with poor and uneducated voters often coerced with food or money to support Déby. Our client recognized the injustice, joined the opposition party National Union for Democracy and Renewal (UNDR), and took on the role of youth coordinator. As the 2016 presidential elections approached, he encouraged Chadian youth to vote for change.

But, his courage came at a terrible price. He was violently abducted from his home by masked men, tortured for three days and threatened with death if he continued his political activism. Broken and battered, he was left on the side of the road. For years he remained silent. Yet, in 2018, when Déby proclaimed the Fourth Republic and eliminated presidential term limits, our client was spurred back into organizing.

Less than three months later, he narrowly escaped another kidnapping attempt and fled the country. Arriving in the United States alone and with limited English, he applied for asylum *pro se*, but was denied due to the language barrier that hindered his application.

Fortunately, he was connected with Duane Morris attorneys who assembled a team of skilled attorneys and prepared for his *de novo* immigration court hearing. The attorneys prepared and reprepared the case *three times* over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic; meanwhile, the political landscape in Chad continued to shift with Déby's sudden death, his son's unconstitutional seizure of power, and the appointment of the former UNDR leader as the new prime minister.

Finally, after six years of waiting, our client had his day in court. After hours of intense and contentious testimony, the judge, recognizing his credibility, granted our client asylum.

Today, our client no longer is just a survivor; he has reclaimed his life. He met his partner, welcomed a daughter into the world and found stable employment transporting medical specimens – work that reflects his desire to contribute to helping others, particularly in a society that gave him a second chance.

“ In matters  
of style, swim  
with the current;  
in matters of  
principle, stand  
like a rock.”

– Thomas Jefferson

## THREE YEARS ON: CONTINUING THE FIGHT FOR AFGHANS' SAFETY

In August 2021, the world watched in horror as Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, marking the abrupt end of a 20-year conflict. The rapid collapse of the Afghan government sent waves of fear and uncertainty through the nation, particularly among those who had allied with the United States and its NATO partners. For many Afghans, especially women, human rights activists, journalists and former interpreters who had worked closely with Western forces, the Taliban's return to power signaled the potential loss of freedom and, in many cases, a threat to their lives.

In response to this crisis, Duane Morris filed hundreds of humanitarian parole, asylum, special immigrant visas and other immigration applications on behalf of Afghans. Three years on, we continue to advocate for our allies, having obtained immigration relief for hundreds of Afghan immigrants.



# COMING TO AMERICA

## **LIBERIAN REFUGEE WINS IMMIGRATION BATTLE TO BE REUNITED WITH HER SIX CHILDREN**

In March 2020, our client arrived in the United States from Liberia seeking refuge from tribal elders and her family due to her courageous stand against the brutal custom of female genital mutilation – which threatened her three young daughters. Despite being found to have a credible fear of returning to Liberia, she immediately was detained by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement amid the chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While she endured the harsh conditions of immigration detention and suffered a mental health crisis, our dedicated attorneys fought tirelessly and won her asylum application. Once released, they assisted her in applying for her six young children in Liberia to join her as asylees in the United States.

Tragically, United State Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) initially denied all six applications, citing insufficient proof of her biological relationship. We successfully appealed, arguing that the dire conditions in Liberia and our client's urgent flight prevented her from obtaining more evidence. USCIS was ordered to reopen all six cases, allowing her to provide DNA testing to prove the biological relationships.

Today, all the applications are approved and the children are awaiting interviews at the United States Embassy in Monrovia. We eagerly anticipate the day when our client finally will be reunited with her beloved children on United States soil, a testament to her resilience and the unwavering support of her legal team.

## **BECOMING U.S. CITIZENS: OUR CLIENTS MAKE US PROUD**

Every year, Duane Morris attorneys represent numerous legal permanent residents on their journey to United States citizenship. In 2023-24, our clients came from all corners of the globe, including Albania, Brazil, Cambodia, Ecuador, India, Israel, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Liberia, Nigeria, Vietnam and more. The naturalization process can be daunting, but it is a vital step that allows immigrants to fully integrate into American society and embrace the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

By becoming naturalized citizens, individuals gain the powerful right to vote, which in 2024 was an especially urgent and exciting goal for many. Naturalization also opens doors to a wider range of job opportunities, educational benefits and social services. Moreover, it instills a profound sense of belonging and commitment to the country, as new citizens pledge allegiance to the United States and its values.

In 2023, the United States had approximately 12.7 million legal permanent residents, with over 877,000 of them taking the final step to naturalize as citizens. We are immensely proud to contribute our pro bono efforts to help our clients achieve this monumental milestone in their immigration journey.

# SPOTLIGHT: RISING STARS: AFGHAN WOMEN ACTIVISTS REFUSED TO BE SILENCED



Two of Duane Morris' clients-turned-activists bring a new level of commitment to serving their community and have helped hundreds of Afghans secure safety. Azada Nyazi founded Infinite Freedom Inc. after helping numerous Afghans seek safety in the United States. Duane Morris attorneys represent her family members still seeking safety as well as in establishing Infinite Freedom pro bono. Summia Tora, founder of Dosti Network and a Rhodes scholar, holds master's degrees in public policy and international human rights law from Oxford and is pursuing a Yale law degree. Duane Morris attorneys represented Summia pro bono in securing an O-1 extraordinary ability visa.

## Tell us a little about yourselves. What inspired you to become an activist?

**AZADA:** Witnessing the struggles in Afghanistan inspired the creation of **Infinite Freedom Inc.**, an organization dedicated to supporting refugees through resettlement and empowerment, with a focus on language training, integration and empowerment. Despite facing constant instability and conflict that hinders the fulfillment of basic needs, the people of Afghanistan maintain a profound hope for a better life. The desire to help others, sparked by these struggles, led to the establishment of this initiative. Infinite Freedom Inc. provides comprehensive support to refugees, displaced individuals and others seeking new opportunities in the United States. The organization guides and empowers individuals

throughout their entire journey – from fleeing danger in their home countries to building new lives in a land of freedom and opportunity. Through resettlement assistance, language training and integration programs, Infinite Freedom Inc. is committed to ensuring that every person has the support they need to thrive.

**SUMMIA:** When the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, I found myself in a race against time to evacuate my family. As I navigated the chaos, I realized countless other families were in the same desperate situation, needing immediate help but with nowhere to turn. I created the **Dosti Network**, rallying volunteers from around the world to provide Afghans with the support they needed – whether immigration assistance, aid, scholarships or simply a sense of hope.



### Will you share a specific moment or experience that solidified your commitment to humanitarian advocacy?

**AZADA:** When the United States arrived in 2001, I saw a renewed sense of hope as volunteer nurses came to our doors for vaccinations. The joy and gratitude from families inspired me deeply and made me realize the impact of even small acts of kindness. At 12, I began teaching English to my neighbors and later expanded to science and math. When I moved to the United States, I continued my efforts finding sponsors for children in Afghanistan, especially those who sold items on the streets. My goal was to give them the chance to go to school. These experiences shaped my belief that small actions can bring hope and create lasting change.

Providing safe houses, covering relocation costs and paying visa and airfare expenses for families is an ongoing struggle. It is difficult to keep up with the financial demands.

**SUMMIA:** Balancing professional commitments while resettling my family and navigating my personal immigration status. There are moments when the weight of these responsibilities feels immense, but persistence is key.

### In your opinion, what is the most effective way to create lasting change?

**AZADA:** I believe in the saying, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." In practical terms, this means

"Thank you for your unwavering support, guidance and the genuine care you show to the Afghan community. We could not have accomplished what we have without your incredible team."

– AZADA NYAZI

**SUMMIA:** At 16, I met Dr. Roshan Thomas during a scholarship exam at the Sarena Hotel in Kabul. Dr. Thomas, chair of the selection committee, encouraged us to keep learning, growing and one day return to make a difference in Afghanistan. Tragically, she was killed the next day in a Taliban attack. Her dedication and sacrifice continue to inspire me; she was an example of the transformative power of education and service.

### Tell us about a recent project or initiative you have been working on and its impact on your community.

**AZADA:** I helped over 30 Afghans navigate the legal process to leave and seek safety in the United States or other countries. There still are many more people awaiting final approvals or support from evacuation teams. The impact of each success motivates me to keep going despite the barriers.

**SUMMIA:** I launched the Emkaan Fellowship in the Dosti Network. A yearlong program for women in Afghanistan and those living as refugees, the fellowship provides mentorship, resources and a support network to advance educational and career aspirations despite significant obstacles. With our partner organization, Project EduAccess, we selected 20 fellows with hopes to expand next year. I hope the women remember they are not alone; there is a world of people standing with them.

### What challenges do you face in your work, both personally and professionally?

**AZADA:** The U.S. immigration system is slow and complex, leaving many at risk. Humanitarian parole applicants, whose lives are in immediate danger, must wait over three years simply for an answer on their applications! It is not a practical solution for those in urgent need.

helping one individual in danger may positively impact their entire family and future generations. My long-term vision, despite the challenges posed by the Taliban, is to establish an education center and mental health clinic in Afghanistan. Education and nurturing peaceful minds creates lasting, meaningful change for communities. Individuals who are not directly involved also make a big impact by sharing stories to amplify Afghan voices, educating themselves and providing financial support. Most importantly, showing kindness, challenging stereotypes and spreading love fosters understanding and solidarity.

**SUMMIA:** Reducing inequities and ensuring access to education and resources for marginalized communities are vital for meaningful change. To create meaningful, enduring change, everyone in a community must have access to knowledge and education. These are not privileges; they are fundamental rights that empower people to make informed decisions and build a better future for themselves and their communities.

### Final thoughts or words of wisdom?

**AZADA:** If I could give one message to attorneys, it would be this: Thank you for the unwavering support, guidance and genuine care you show to the Afghan community. We would not have accomplished what we have without your incredible team. You have always been available, informed and endlessly supportive. When everything seemed lost, your willingness to walk beside us made all the difference. We are deeply grateful!

**SUMMIA:** I am incredibly grateful to Duane Morris for their unwavering support in overcoming legal challenges, allowing Dosti Network to reach more people in need.

# PRO BONO NATION: ILLINOIS



**Our Chicago office provided more than 3,000 pro bono hours in the past year.**

With a client base that includes Fortune 500 companies, privately held middle market companies, emerging growth companies and entrepreneurs, Duane Morris' Chicago office provides a broad array of services to organizations in a wide range of industries. The intensity and experience of the senior attorneys in the Chicago office – much of it enhanced by prior positions with city, state and federal legal departments and as corporate counsel to large companies – help fuel the energetic atmosphere that sets the firm apart in the highly competitive Chicago legal arena.



## VINDICATING PRISONER RIGHTS AND SEEKING HEALTH JUSTICE

Appointed by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois' Trial Bar Pro Bono Panel, a team of Chicago litigators obtained over \$750,000 in damages for our client following a seven-year Section 1983 civil rights battle against various state correctional centers, health facilities and physicians. Our client suffered a hernia in 2014 after abdominal surgery. Despite being aware of the hernia and our client's unique situation because of his prior abdominal surgery, his medical care was ignored and he was denied surgery to repair the hernia. He also suffered from spinal stenosis, degenerative disc disease and resulting chronic neck and back pain, for which he was denied and delayed treatment.

In 2016, our client filed a lawsuit seeking surgery for his hernia, proper treatment for his chronic pain and damages. Appointed in 2017, Duane Morris attorneys secured an injunction in 2018 requiring the Illinois Department of Corrections to repair our client's hernia, which had grown to the point that *nearly 90 percent of his intestines were outside of his abdominal wall.*

The surgery was successful, and over the past six years, the team has worked to obtain financial damages for our client. The case was made more difficult because our client had to prove deliberate indifference on the part of the defendants, a high standard. In March 2024, following an 11-day jury trial, our client was awarded damages in both his hernia claim (\$500,000) and his back pain claim (\$250,000), along with a punitive damages award against two of the defendants (\$125,000). Since trial, our client has settled with some of the defendants, avoiding post-trial motions and appeal.

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“ We were incredibly gratified to secure a victory for our client, who had endured so much. Cases like this are notoriously hard to win, and the defendants fought for years to get a favorable outcome, both in summary judgment and at trial, rather than compensate our client for the harms he endured. Without attorneys willing to work pro bono, prisoners like our client would have little access to legal recourse for their suffering. It is a powerful reminder of how critical it is to provide legal assistance to those most in need. ”



Rosanne Ciambrone,  
Partner

## BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: CORPORATE LAWYERS LEAD EFFORT TO EXPUNGE JUVENILE RECORDS

Corporate lawyers providing criminal record expungement relief? It sounds like something out of a bad movie, but over the past year a team of Chicago Corporate partners led over two dozen volunteer attorneys to draft several dozen juvenile record expungement petitions with the **Chicago Legal Aid Society**. Across the United States, students of color, students with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ students are disproportionately disciplined in school and more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. Expungements help disrupt systemic barriers imposed by juvenile criminal records and improve access to jobs, education and housing. The clinic also broke down the attorneys' own perceived barriers and fears about pro bono, not being litigators or practicing criminal law.

## FROM LOVE TO LEGAL BATTLE: SECURING SAFETY FOR MOTHER AND AUTISTIC SON IN INTERNATIONAL CUSTODY DISPUTE

In 2017, while working for a nonprofit in Greece, our client met and fell in love with her partner, an Iranian refugee. They had a son together, now age 5 and diagnosed with autism. In 2022, with her partner's support, our client moved to New York with their son for specialized education and she applied for a fiancé visa for her partner to join them.

Last year on a visit to Greece, the partner's behavior took a dark turn. He confined our client, seized her and her son's passports and phone, and verbally abused her. She managed to contact a friend through her laptop, who alerted the U.S. Embassy. Greek authorities intervened, arresting the partner and helping her return safely to the U.S. A criminal case was filed against the partner, and she withdrew the fiancé visa. In retaliation, he filed a petition under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, accusing her of child abduction and demanding their son's return.

Working with **Sanctuary for Families**, Trial attorneys in Duane Morris' Chicago office defended our client in federal court, successfully arguing the father lacked custody rights and had no legal standing under the Hague Convention, not to mention he was not a Greek citizen (the Hague Convention party in question). He further faced potential deportation to Iran. The court sided with our client, affirming her right to safety in the U.S., where she and her son now will rebuild their lives.

# PRO BONO NATION: FLORIDA



**Our Florida offices provided nearly 2,000 pro bono hours in the past year.**

Duane Morris' Boca Raton and Miami offices provide a wide range of legal services and strategic advice to individuals, entrepreneurs, middle market companies and large multinational entities with interests in South Florida and throughout the world. From estate planning to construction law and protecting intellectual property via trademarks and patents – just to name a few areas – attorneys serve clients locally and globally, helping them navigate a changing and complex legal and business landscape.

## **ADVOCATING TO REFORM A BROKEN SYSTEM: WHEN PROCESS SUPERSEDES JUSTICE**

In a case that underscores the harms of civil asset forfeiture, Duane Morris Criminal and Appellate attorneys represented the **Florida Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers** – a nonprofit organization with a membership of over 1,300 attorneys and 29 chapters throughout Florida – as amici urging the United States Supreme Court to review *Sanchez v. United States of America* and highlighting the tension between property rights and procedural technicalities.

In 2021, Jacqueline Palacios sent \$9,000 to Luis Sanchez to purchase electronic merchandise through an intermediary,

Carlos Quipse Cancari. Unbeknownst to them, Cancari was also transporting drugs. When Cancari was arrested, he told police that the cash was not his – it belonged to Sanchez – and had no connection to the drugs. Nonetheless, federal authorities seized the money under civil forfeiture laws, which allow the government to confiscate property based on the mere suspicion that it is linked to criminal activity – without charging the owner with a crime. Petitioners timely initiated a civil proceeding to challenge the governments' seizure of their property, but the district court dismissed their case, ruling the petition was defective because only the petitioners' attorneys had signed it, not petitioners. The court refused to allow petitioners to fix the procedural error, stating the filing deadline passed, and the Eleventh Circuit affirmed.



Duane Morris attorneys argued such a draconian enforcement of a technical requirement destroyed the purpose of forfeiture proceedings: to give innocent third parties an opportunity to reclaim property. Civil forfeiture laws originally were designed to combat drug trafficking and organized crime by targeting assets used to facilitate criminal enterprises. Yet, as this case highlights, innocent

the lingering stigma that prevents many individuals from reclaiming their place in society.

This work is about more than casting a ballot – it's about redemption, dignity and the belief that people can change. FRRC's message is simple yet powerful: If people can transform their lives, their records and civic rights should reflect that change, too.

“Through a true team effort, we reunited a father with his sons. It was much sweeter than saving my client money, as I usually do as defense counsel, and it was one of the proudest and most important moments in my life.”

– MICHAEL SHUMAN, PARTNER



people can lose their property even if they committed no crime. Because the government targets the property itself rather than the owner, individuals must fight an uphill legal battle to prove their own innocence – a reversal of the usual burden of proof in criminal cases. Though the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case, the issues surrounding civil asset forfeiture persist, and the Court likely will weigh in again soon.

## FROM PRISON TO POLLS: RESTORING VOTING RIGHTS

Desmond Meade's journey from homelessness, addiction and despair to becoming the executive director of the **Florida Rights Restoration Coalition** (FRRC) is a powerful testament to personal transformation – and the urgent need for systemic change. Desmond, who once struggled with a felony record, fought his way back, earning a law degree from Florida International University. But despite his achievements, the system still stood in his way: He could not vote for his own wife when she ran for the state Legislature.



*Desmond Meade - a 2021 MacArthur Genius Award winner, Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World 2019 - leads a research-a-thon legal clinic for Duane Morris volunteers at the firm's annual meeting.*

Determined to dismantle these barriers, Desmond founded FRRC, a movement that fights against disenfranchisement laws and advocates for a second chance at full civic participation.

Throughout the year, attorneys and legal professionals across Duane Morris' offices partnered with FRRC in a series of "Voting Rights Restoration Research-a-Thons," reviewing over 1,000 criminal records, fines and fees, helping pave the way for hundreds of Floridians to restore their right to vote. These efforts tackle not just legal roadblocks but

## REUNITING FATHER AND SONS: A LEGAL VICTORY UNDER THE UNITED NATIONS HAGUE CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION

Our client and his sons lived together in Jamaica until August 2021, when the boys' mother left Jamaica with the children under the false pretense of a two-week Disney World vacation. Instead of returning with the children, the mother remained in the United States, married a United States citizen and initiated the process of becoming a lawful permanent resident on behalf of herself and the boys. For two years, our client tried to get his children back and hit brick wall after brick wall. Duane Morris was his last resort.

In December 2023, a Trial partner and two Trial associates in the firm's Miami office filed a petition under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction seeking the boys' return to Jamaica, their home. With the support of an Immigration partner and paralegal lending immigration advice, the team tried the matter before the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, securing an order granting our client's petition and returning the sons to their father and home in Jamaica.

## BUILDING A FUTURE: GI305 LAUNCHES GUARANTEED INCOME PROGRAM FOR MIAMI STUDENTS

**GI305** fosters social and economic empowerment for the residents and workforce of Miami through the establishment of a permanent guaranteed income. The Young People's GI (guaranteed income) Program provides weekly allowances to eligible students starting from third grade, with the allowance increasing each school year until the student graduates from 12th grade. The goal: support students' financial security and educational attainment by providing unconditional cash payments to meet their basic needs and develop financial literacy skills. Duane Morris Corporate attorneys are helping negotiate an affiliation agreement between GI305 and the Miami-Dade Public Schools to launch the Young People's GI Program.

# PRO BONO NATION: NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY



**Our New York and New Jersey offices provided over 7,000 hours of pro bono service over the past year.**

Duane Morris' New York and New Jersey attorneys provide a diverse range of services to domestic and international clients ranging from large multinational corporations to closely held entrepreneurial businesses. The firm maintains one of its largest contingents of attorneys in New York to better serve its clients operating within many global industries, including attorney groups focused on financial services, corporate, trial, finance, intellectual property, real estate, bankruptcy, venture capital and emerging companies, employment, labor, immigration and benefits, insurance, private client services, media and communications, and tax, among others.



# SPOTLIGHT: ADVANCING LGBTQIA+ EQUITY AND SECURITY

Over 60 countries criminalize same-sex sexual activity. Jamaica still enforces an anti-sodomy law from 1864 that carries a prison sentence of up to 10 years. The country is one of only six remaining Caribbean countries to criminalize consensual homosexual conduct.

In 2015, Kemar and Matthew fled Jamaica after experiencing beatings, discrimination, harassment, repeated death threats and attempted murder due to their relationship and identities as gay men. Shortly after arriving in the United States, Duane Morris, working with **Immigration Equality**, filed asylum applications just as United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) changed its processing rules to “last in, first out,” which mandates that all new immigration applications be adjudicated first: the opposite of a traditional, orderly line. Kemar filed his application just before the policy went into effect, and Matthew’s application was filed just after.

As a result, Matthew’s asylum application was granted fairly quickly, permitting him to become a lawful permanent resident. But Kemar’s application languished, leaving him in legal limbo for over seven years, during which time the two were married. Yet, despite being married to a U.S. resident, Kemar was unable to become a lawful permanent resident himself because he lacked formal immigration status.

In fall 2023, Duane Morris attorneys advocated with USCIS, preparing to file a mandamus complaint due to USCIS’ failure to schedule Kemar for an asylum interview, effectively placing Kemar’s application in de facto indefinite suspension. Fortunately, on the eve of Pride Month, Kemar was granted an asylum interview, and shortly thereafter, asylum.

Kemar and Matthew returned to Duane Morris in June to celebrate the win, discuss their lives now and highlight the importance of pro bono service as part of a panel discussion celebrating Pride Month.

### **What was your biggest success in the past year?**

**KEMAR:** My biggest success this year is being approved for asylum after waiting over eight years. From sleeping on the floor of my sister’s home to now being married for four years, owning our own

home and sharing our life with our beloved 1-year-old goldendoodle, Ziggy, we have come a long way. We have jobs that allow us to live comfortably and take care of ourselves and our family.

**MATTHEW:** For me, my biggest success in the past year is earning my MBA. It is something I always had on my to-do list. Being in this country has given me the means and opportunity to finally check that off my list.

### **What is something you learned about the immigration system in the U.S.? Was it as you expected or different?**

**MATTHEW:** The United States immigration system is highly politicized. Patience is key. While Matthew had his asylum interview in 2017, I had to wait eight years. There is a massive backlog in various immigration



*Matthew and Kemar on their wedding day.*

**“Your work does not just help us legally – it gives us hope and the ability to dream again. Patience and compassion make all the difference. Knowing that someone is in our corner, advocating for us, helps us endure the long and challenging process.”**

– KEMAR

cases. I have friends in New York and Massachusetts who filed for asylum before I did, yet they still are waiting for an interview. Some have been waiting for over nine or 10 years; it is disheartening.

We had to put our lives on pause and essentially start over. For a while, we were not able to work, and we lived in constant fear of traveling.

This is why it is essential to have attorneys who can offer reassurance along the way, helping you take it one day at a time. The attorneys who worked on our case were a true blessing. They kept us informed, answered all of our questions and concerns, and gave us confidence.

**What advice would you give to other LGBTQIA+ community members or immigrants?**

**KEMAR:** Our advice to other LGBTQIA+ community members is the American dream is real. In America, you are free to live the life you always wanted, the life you might be scared to live in Jamaica. People in America are more open-minded and tolerant of our lifestyle. There are policies in place that protect us in the workplace and laws that allow us to get legally married. These are rights we are not afforded in Jamaica, and they make a significant difference in how we live and feel safe.

**If you could give one message to attorneys about asylum seekers, what would it be?**

**MATTHEW:** Your guidance and reassurance are invaluable. Many of us come from situations where we had to put our lives on hold, face uncertainty and navigate a complex and politicized system. Your work does not just help us legally - it gives us hope and the ability to dream again. Patience and compassion make all the difference. Knowing that someone is in our corner, advocating for us, helps us endure the long and challenging process.

**What is next? Do you have any new goals?**

**KEMAR:** Now that we both have status, our next goal is to enjoy our freedom a bit more. We are planning to visit friends in Canada, and we also have a long-term goal of visiting all 50 states. We already visited a few, and we started collecting memorabilia from each state to add to our growing collection. Of course, Matt also is looking forward to applying to be a U.S. citizen in just a few years.



## PEOPLE CHANGE – RECORDS SHOULD TOO

One in three American adults have a criminal record – over 77 million people, or the same number of people that have a college degree. Beyond this harsh reality lies further collateral consequences: 90 percent of employers, 80 percent of landlords and 67 percent of colleges screen for criminal records. Duane Morris proudly believes that people change and records should too. In collaboration with our corporate clients TD Bank and Reckitt Benckiser, Duane Morris attorneys teamed up with **Volunteer Lawyers for Justice** and **South Jersey Legal Services** to assist individuals in expunging their criminal records. By combining resources and legal knowledge, attorneys helped individuals navigate the complex process of record clearing, providing practical support to those looking to move forward with a clean slate.

## SHAPING FUTURE LEADERS: NEW JERSEY STUDENTS DIVE INTO LAW AND BUSINESS

A mentoring organization that empowers youth from underserved neighborhoods in northern New Jersey to greater educational achievement, **NJ LEEP** helps lower-income and first-generation students attend and graduate from college. For several years, Duane Morris' New York and New Jersey offices have hosted NJ LEEP high school students for a “week on the job,” introducing the students to what it looks like to be a lawyer or legal professional. In addition to a mock immigration hearing and mock trial, students spent a morning with federal District Court Judge Julien Neals and a day with Duane Morris firm client **Amogy Inc.** Students also made mock pitches to investors in a game of “Environmental Shark Tank” at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.



## DUANE MORRIS SERVES AS KEY PARTNER OF THE FRENCH CONSULATE AT 2024 BASTILLE DAY SUMMER STAGE CONCERT

For several years, Duane Morris New York Immigration attorneys have led a pro bono drop-in legal clinic at the French Consulate in New York. Attorneys advise French citizens on all manner of legal questions, taking on representation as appropriate. Taking it up a notch, for the second year, New York attorneys also obtained nonimmigrant O and P visas pro bono for award-winning musicians IAM, Magic System and The Avener, who performed at the consulate's 2024 Bastille Day Summer Stage.

# PRO BONO NATION: WASHINGTON, D.C.



**Our Washington, D.C., office provided nearly 2,000 pro bono hours over the past year.**

Duane Morris' lawyers in Washington, D.C., represent clients before state and federal courts; state, federal and international agencies; the U.S. Congress; and other legislative bodies. Our attorneys have extensive experience with U.S. government agencies and thoroughly understand the complex state and federal regulations governing corporate practices as well as intellectual property law. As many of our D.C. attorneys previously held leadership positions in the government and military, they offer an experienced perspective on how regulatory, legislative and procedural developments can impact our clients.



## FROM COMBAT TO COMPENSATION: SECURING JUSTICE AND DISABILITY BENEFITS FOR VIETNAM-ERA VETERAN

As a 19 year old in 1968, our client enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. Voluntarily waiving his right to a “duty in noncombat areas discharge” as a sole surviving son, he committed to serving his country for four years during the Vietnam War. After completing advanced infantry training at Camp Lejeune, he was deployed to the Republic of South Vietnam as a machine gunner with the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, 1st Marine Division, C Company. He served as a combat marine fighting against communist insurgents in Operation Allen Brook, earning the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnamese Service Medal and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

While serving, our client began experiencing seizure activity, leading to his evacuation to a hospital ship, and later, to the U.S. hospital in Yokosuka, Japan. Despite being returned to limited duty stateside, he was diagnosed with delayed combat fatigue, exhibiting symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which was yet to be understood or diagnosed as an illness. He experienced night terrors, withdrawal from personal relations and inability to engage in verbal stimuli. Without access to proper treatment, he turned to illegal drugs to self-medicate and numb his symptoms. Ultimately, he was discharged in 1970 with an “other than honorable” characterization of service, barring him from accessing critical VA medical care and other benefits.

Board of Veterans Appeals, securing a 100 percent rating for service-connected disability benefits for PTSD and MDD, retroactive to 2018. This victory brought our client not only a life-changing monetary award of nearly \$200,000 in retroactive benefits, but also ongoing monthly support.

Now suffering from dementia and other ailments, our client finally has the financial stability and recognition that was denied to him for decades. Duane Morris continues to fight for further retroactive benefits, ensuring this veteran receives the full measure of justice.

## CHAMPIONING JUSTICE FOR A MISDIAGNOSED AIR FORCE VETERAN

In our 2022 Pro Bono Report, we shared the story of a young Air Force veteran whose life was shattered by a series of devastating events. Following a traumatic physical assault by a fellow service member, the veteran's long-buried PTSD, stemming from a sexual assault in her teenage years, was retriggered, and she was misdiagnosed with borderline personality disorder instead of PTSD. This misdiagnosis led to her being labeled “unsuitable” for service, resulting in a swift and unjust administrative discharge rather than medical retirement. Her DD-214 discharge papers – a document she must present whenever she seeks employment, education or positions of trust – forced her to publicly share this diagnosis as it listed “personality disorder” as the characterization of discharge.

“True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”

– ARTHUR ASHE

Nearly five decades later, in 2019, the Board for Correction of Naval Records acknowledged our client had been suffering from PTSD at the time of his discharge and upgraded his characterization of service to a general discharge. With this upgrade, our client was eligible to access service-connected disability benefits, but when he attempted to do so on his own, he was met with barriers.

He turned to Duane Morris for help in securing service-connected disability benefits for his PTSD and major depressive disorder (MDD). Attorneys in the firm's Washington, D.C., office took immediate action, meticulously reviewing reams of medical records and facilitating independent medical evaluations. Their diligent work culminated in a successful appeal to the

Understanding the profound injustice our client faced, Trial attorneys from Duane Morris, who are veterans themselves, took up her case with unwavering dedication. They petitioned the Air Force Board of Correction for Military Records to amend our client's DD-214 to reflect a discharge due to a “condition not a disability.”

Facing fierce resistance from biased U.S. Air Force psychological and medical advisors, the attorneys employed neutral medical experts to thoroughly rebut the Air Force's claims and zealously argued before the board. After four years of relentless effort, the board finally granted our client's petition, acknowledging that she had been “the victim of an error or injustice.”

# COLLABORATING CORPORATE PARTNERS



**NIDO**  
DE ESPERANZA



**Mount  
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Partnership





# COLLABORATING LEGAL AIDS

Advocates for Trans Equality  
 American Immigration Council  
 American Immigration Lawyers Association  
 Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation  
 Boston Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts  
 Casa Cornelia Law Center  
 Center for Reproductive Rights  
 Center for Wrongful Convictions  
 Chesapeake Legal Alliance  
 City Bar Justice Center of the New York  
 City Bar Association  
 Community Legal Services  
 Consumer Bankruptcy Assistance Project  
 Counseling or Referral Assistance Services  
 Dade Legal Aid: Put Something Back  
 Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program  
 D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program  
 Delaware Innocence Project  
 Delaware Volunteer Legal Services  
 Federal Circuit Bar Association  
 Florida Immigrant Coalition  
 Florida Rights Restoration Coalition  
 Freedom Network USA  
 Georgia Lawyers for the Arts  
 Georgia PATENTS  
 Greater Boston Legal Services  
 Green Pro Bono Inc.

Harvard Veterans Law Clinic  
 HIAS Pennsylvania  
 Homeless Advocacy Project  
 Houston Volunteer Lawyers  
 Immigration Equality  
 Immigration Justice Campaign  
 Innocence Network  
 International Refugee Assistance Project  
 Juvenile Law Center  
 Kids in Need of Defense  
 Lawyers Alliance for New York  
 Lawyers for Creative Arts  
 Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under  
 Law  
 Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under  
 Law of the San Francisco Bay Area  
 Law Firm Antiracism Alliance  
 Legal Aid Chicago  
 Legal Aid of Marin  
 Legal Aid Society of San Diego  
 Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County  
 Legal Services of Greater Miami  
 Legal Services for Children  
 Legal Services NYC  
 MassChallenge Inc.  
 Mount Sinai Medical Legal Partnership  
 Northern California Innocence Project

Pennsylvania Innocence Project  
 Public Counsel  
 Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity  
 Philadelphia Legal Assistance  
 Philadelphia Volunteer Lawyers for the  
 Arts/PA Patent  
 Philadelphia Volunteers for the Indigent  
 Program  
 Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta  
 Public Interest Law Center  
 San Diego County Bar Association  
 San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program  
 Sanctuary for Families  
 SeniorLAW Center  
 Start Small Think Big  
 Support Center for Child Advocates  
 Swords to Plowshares  
 Texas Accountants and Lawyers for  
 the Arts  
 Texas CBAR  
 The Law Society of Singapore  
 The Veterans Consortium Pro Bono  
 Program  
 TrustLaw  
 Veteran Advocacy Project  
 Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts  
 Volunteer Lawyers for Justice  
 Women's Law Project

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