

Taking on a pro bono matter offers many benefits—the opportunity to use your legal skills to help a nonprofit or an individual in need, focus on a cause that’s meaningful to you, or learn about a new area of law, all with the full support of the firm. Most important of all, you will be making a difference for people and nonprofits trying to navigate hard times.

In this issue of *Pro Bono News*, we follow a race against the clock to keep 125 families in shelter in Boston, join in the effort to help Afghans resettle in the UK, encounter a woman with an asylum case who later fell prey to a crypto scam, and visit a financially troubled meditation retreat center in Colorado. We also see what justice truly looks like for a man who served 32 years—10 on death row—for a crime he did not commit.

We hope you enjoy learning about the impact of Ropes & Gray’s pro bono program in recent months.

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WHAT WE’RE DOING



Ropes & Gray wins the Changemakers “Volunteers of the Year” award from Heading Home, along with lawyers from Mintz.

Keeping 125 Families Sheltered



Devin Cohen

In the spring of 2022, Casa Nueva Vida (CNV), a homeless shelter in Boston, learned its state contract would not be renewed due to alleged embezzlement by its former CEO. This would leave 125-plus families served by the shelter with nowhere to go. Our client Heading Home, also a shelter provider in Boston, wanted to help. Ropes & Gray advised Heading Home on its negotiations with CNV and discussions with Massachusetts state regulators. Health care partner **Devin Cohen** shares his experience leading this matter.

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Doing Good by the NUMBERS

2,090

colleagues firmwide contributed

128,500+

hours of pro bono service in 2022

100%

All lawyers met the 20-hour goal in three offices—Seoul, Shanghai and Silicon Valley—and two practice groups—data, privacy & cybersecurity and life sciences

Q What was your first reaction to the developments at Casa Nueva Vida?

A Frankly, I was scared. I feared that the families would lose shelter and air conditioning by mid-summer. I also worried about the staff of CNV—that despite their dedicated years of service, they would be left holding the bag because of an executive’s misconduct. But the entire Heading Home staff remained optimistic and was very focused on migrating CNV’s prior programs and housing resources to benefit those families CNV historically sheltered.

Q Can you talk a bit about Heading Home’s mission and work?

A Heading Home is the largest provider of shelter for families in Massachusetts, working with more than 1,300 clients annually, over half of whom are children. Its unique housing-plus-services model has yielded a 16-year success rate of 90% of clients remaining permanently housed. When it came to assuming the former CNV program, Heading Home was committed to maintaining the cultural identity of CNV, which supports primarily Spanish-speaking families on their paths out of homelessness in the Greater Boston and Lawrence regions.

Q What legal advice did we provide?

A Our goal was to find a legal solution where Heading Home could keep these families in shelter with minimal interruption to their lives while continuing to comply with nonprofit laws and regulations. We considered the pros and cons of various transaction types, including a merger or asset purchase, among others. Ultimately, though, to avoid unknown liabilities, we advised Heading Home to seek an expansion of its current contract with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and enter into license/lease arrangements with CNV to ensure ongoing access to the facilities and related personal property. Our team worked with Heading Home to negotiate transition agreements, IP licenses and real estate leases with CNV, and contract expansion with DHCD and the attorney general’s office. Throughout, we worked closely with co-counsel Mintz.

Q Were there any unique challenges?

A Time. On June 30, CNV’s contract would expire. And we knew the outcome if we didn’t get it right. At the same

time, while everyone was anxious to get a deal done, we had to make sure our client wasn’t going to take on too much risk. So it was a race against the clock as we conducted diligence and analyzed potential risk from every angle while also working to ensure a positive outcome for the families.

For me personally, it was also an opportunity to learn more about other areas of the law, such as real estate. And I was reminded of a great lesson in negotiations: when things get tough, it’s best to refocus on the joint goal. In this case, people’s lives were at stake. Talk about making a difference. There’s no more important goal than that.

THE TEAM: In addition to Devin, the team included retired partner **Anne Ogilby**; partners **Jeff Katz** and **Megan Bisk**; principal **Ellen Benson**; counsel **Emily Karlberg**; and associates **Mike McGrath**, **AT Desta**, **Chris Shorey** and **Brianna Isaacson**. Mintz acted as counsel to Heading Home on real estate matters.

Redress for a 40-Year Injustice

Ropes & Gray achieved a monumental victory after more than three decades of pro bono advocacy for John Huffington, who



Chong Park and John Huffington in the D.C. office.

was wrongfully convicted of first-degree murder in 1981 and served 32 years in prison—10 on death row. In 2013, through DNA testing and with our team’s help, the court vacated his

convictions and ordered a new trial. The prosecution continued to pursue the case, and Mr. Huffington ultimately entered a special plea called an Alford plea that enabled him to maintain his innocence and his freedom. But the Alford plea resulted in a judicial conviction that actively hindered Mr. Huffington’s personal, professional and financial success.

Our team thought Mr. Huffington deserved more, especially since a key reason for his Alford plea was the conduct of the state’s attorney, who withheld evidence and made many

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WHY IT MATTERS

“This is justice. Granting John a full innocence pardon was the right thing to do, and we are elated by the governor’s decision.”

— **CHONG PARK**, Partner

misrepresentations. We helped Mr. Huffington file an ethics complaint against the prosecutor in 2018. Ultimately, Maryland's highest court disbarred the prosecutor in 2021—only the fifth prosecutor in U.S. history to be disbarred for unethical conduct.

In this last chapter of the firm's longest-running pro bono case, we assisted Mr. Huffington with fully clearing his name by seeking a full innocence pardon. This year, justice was finally served when Governor Larry Hogan of Maryland granted the pardon. We have also filed a request under a state law that compensates exonerees for the time they were wrongfully imprisoned; in Mr. Huffington's case, we requested approximately \$2.9 million. Since 1989, 152 Ropes & Gray timekeepers have given more than 16,500 hours to this matter.

THE TEAM (for the matters described here): Partners **Chong Park, Alex Rene** and **Rob Jones**; associates **Ryan Brunner, Jennie Cullinane, Eileen Falk, K'sean Henderson, Chimso Okoji, Alexis Ramsey, Adam Safadi, Donald Saltmarsh-Lubin, Stefan Schropp** and **Shennel Sanyaolu**; paralegals **Matthew Haut** and **Monica Sebastian**; and support team members **Joe D'Imperio, Jesse Gonzalez, Roni Greene, Lisa Hermes, Suzanne Kidder, Dave Kolpin, Paul Lang** and **Delia Montesinos**.



An Immigration Victory for a Client Enmeshed in a Crypto Scam

Our client, a successful businesswoman, fled Nepal more than a decade ago because of political persecution and sought asylum in the United States. Eventually, her application was granted, but she grew despondent waiting for her derivative application on behalf of her family to be approved.

Vulnerable and alone, she fell victim to a cyber scam in which she was encouraged to purchase cryptocurrency and then “invest” it in bogus gold derivative trades. In the end, she lost all the money she'd saved from the sale of her business in Nepal, as well as substantial borrowed sums from family and friends.

Members of Ropes & Gray's litigation department and blockchain task force have been working to recover these crypto assets. After the team analyzed various blockchain transaction records, they discovered that the same perpetrators scammed many others. Ropes connected our client to law enforcement, and she has been aiding their investigation. But the trauma of being away from her family while experiencing such enormous losses took a toll on our client's mental health and her ability to assist law enforcement. On that basis, the team filed a request with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to expedite approval of her family's derivative application. This was successful, and her family should soon begin the process of joining her in the United States.

THE TEAM: Partner **Peter Welsh**; counsel **Mark Cianci**; senior attorney **Irina Sivachenko**; and associates **Karina Thomas, Shong Yin, Kelley Chandler, Risa Kuroda** and **Deb Pabon Cifuentes**; and paralegal **Vanessa Ferrara**.

An Ambitious UK Pro Bono Collective to Help Afghan Refugees

Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, at least 150,000 Afghan refugees have tried to resettle in the UK. Only a small portion have received legal advice. To help, Ropes & Gray teamed up with two UK charities, Refugee Legal Support and Safe Passage, and 13 other law firms to form the Afghan Pro Bono Initiative (APBI), one of the most ambitious pro bono partnerships to date. As of now, 70 volunteers across 14 firms have provided representation to 86 Afghan nationals looking to join family members in the UK or apply for the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy scheme. The APBI received the “Most Effective Pro Bono Partnership” award at the LawWorks 2022 Pro Bono Awards in December.

THE TEAM: Counsel **Paola Bahari** and associates **Felipe Lima, Sabiah Khatun, Lewis Hammond** and **Andrew Baker**. In addition, more than 20 other lawyers in London gave advice to Afghan refugees before the APBI was formalized.

WHY IT MATTERS

“The impact of the Afghan Pro Bono Initiative will be long-lasting and life-changing to the people you work with.”

— JUDGES OF THE 2022 LAWWORKS PRO BONO AWARDS

Renewed Life for a Colorado Meditation Retreat

When retired business restructuring partner **Jim Wilton** first visited Drala Mountain Center (DMC) years ago, he never imagined that many years later he would be involved in an effort to save the meditation retreat center. But over the past five years, DMC encountered one roadblock after another—the pandemic, a devastating wildfire and a sexual misconduct scandal, which DMC had investigated by an outside law firm. The confluence of these events hindered DMC’s ability to repay its secured debt. Our team stepped in to help negotiate a restructuring of the debt. When we were unable to reach a deal with the secured lender, we helped DMC file a voluntary petition under Subchapter V of Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code. In bankruptcy, we negotiated a restructuring deal with the secured lender, with all creditors voting in favor of the plan. In September 2022, DMC successfully emerged from bankruptcy, with a brighter, more stable financial future.

THE TEAM: In addition to Jim, the team included partner **Andrew Devore**; counsel **Patty Chen**; associates **Eric Schriesheim**, **Katharine Scott**, **Eric Sherman** and **Meir Weinberg**; and paralegals **Nova Alindogan**, **Teresa Cassidy** and **Roberto Jose Gonzalez**.



EXPANDING OUR REACH

In this issue, we spotlight our partnership with Medtronic, through which we are collaborating on disability benefits appeals for veterans.

- **THE CLIENT** We are working with The Veterans Consortium, a nonprofit that assists unrepresented veterans or their family members who have filed appeals at the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and recruits and trains attorneys to provide legal help.
- **THE COLLABORATION** Ropes & Gray takes the lead on representing the client, while Medtronic’s team of lawyers and other professionals offers knowledge and insight on medical-related questions.



- **THE CASES** We’ve handled two cases in the past six to nine months, which we were able to resolve during the pre-briefing conference by convincing Veterans Affairs attorneys that the Board of Veterans’ Appeals should reconsider and re-evaluate certain of our clients’ claims. Following those successes, we have taken on two additional cases.

THE TEAM: Partners **Sam Brenner** and **Matt Rizzolo**; associates **Kathryn Thornton**, **Brendan McLaughlin**, **Cole Dunn**, **Allen Cross**, **Nick Bortz**, **Brian Lebow**, **Ashley Riley**, **Stephanie Wald**, **Tae Kim**, **Chris Fons** and **Donald Saltmarsh-Lubin**; paralegals **Emma Berger**, **Mark Callahan**, **Rogelio Jose Jr.** and **Jenna McAssey**; and support team members **Taylor Bond**, **Joe D’Imperio**, **Thomas Doherty**, **Emma Drew**, **Cameron Evans**, **Alex Grinstein**, **Lisa Hermes**, **Michelle Kahn**, **Paul Lang**, **Vinny Piarulli** and **Aaron Rose**.

WHY IT MATTERS

“You guys are angels ... this is the first time anybody took a look [at my case].”

— **OUR CLIENT**, a U.S. Navy veteran

Support for Nonprofit Working to Prevent Gun Violence Globally

The nonprofit Global Action on Gun Violence (GAGV) sees gun violence as a global problem and is working with the international community to stop dangerous gun industry practices through impact litigation, human rights proceedings and policy advocacy. Our team has helped GAGV with two research projects: one focused on intellectual property, and the other a comparative study of gun regulation efforts in 20 countries. More than 30 team members are involved from Boston, Chicago, London, New York, San Francisco, Silicon Valley and Washington, D.C.

Lawyers in Asia Offices Take on Wide Range of Pro Bono Work

In recent months, our lawyers across Asia have devoted time to projects focusing on LGBTQ+ equality, human trafficking and human rights abuses, criminal justice, and housing rights, as well as providing general corporate support for NGOs. They helped draft Out Leadership's CEO Business Briefs to ensure that companies are aware of the laws and regulations that impact LGBTQ+ people in countries where they operate worldwide, conducted case reviews for the Innocence Project, and updated an important report on the enforcement regime around bribery in 47 leading export countries for Transparency International. They have also advised Lawyers Without Borders, DT Institute, The Remedy Project, the Michigan State Appellate Defender Office, tenants in San Francisco's Chinatown, PILPG and the International Legal Foundation.

PRO BONO CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW & POLICY GROUP

The firm partners on many matters with the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG), a global pro bono law firm founded in London that provides legal assistance in peace negotiations, post-conflict constitutions and war crimes prosecution/transitional justice. In 2022, we took on three pro bono research matters from PILPG related to Crimea, Yemen and Sudan, with 41 lawyers and support team members logging 1,300 pro bono hours. In September 2022, we published a white paper with PILPG that focused on the legality and impact of the September 23–27 Russian referendum in the occupied Ukrainian territories.

WHY IT MATTERS

"PILPG would like to express our sincere gratitude for the help and support Ropes & Gray has provided in our efforts to work toward justice for Ukraine. It has been immensely important and valuable."

— **SINDIJA BĒTA**, Program Manager,
Public International Law & Policy Group

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Manager of Pro Bono

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Pro Bono Coordinator