

**Robinson+Cole**

Pro Bono

At a Glance



April 2016

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### MESSAGE FROM PETER R. KNIGHT, PRO BONO PARTNER

Like many of our peer firms, Robinson+Cole participates in a number of pro bono reporting initiatives, coordinating with organizations that gather and publish statistics on the amount of time that firms dedicate to pro bono matters and the value of that time. Having recently gone through this annual exercise, the numbers are fresh in my mind, and they are truly impressive. 2015 was an outstanding year for pro bono work at R+C.



In 2015, our lawyer and nonlawyer timekeepers contributed over 9,000 billable hours, with a value of over \$3 million, toward pro bono work. As noteworthy as those numbers are, we should continue to aim higher—not simply because pro bono service is an ethical obligation we all share or because it typically provides a meaningful experience for the professionals involved (all true!). The real impetus is the economy. There is a vast and growing market for pro bono services. As government budgets are slashed and financial markets continue a slow recovery, legal aid organizations are often forced to make cutbacks that result in fewer staff lawyers and support staff ready to help the needy. The community needs our pro bono services now more than ever.

The Pro Bono Committee is committed to doing its part, continuing recent efforts to provide improved communications about a wider array of available pro bono opportunities. To that end, if there is anything the committee can do to help you reach your personal pro bono goals, please [contact us](#).

### TWO ROBINSON+COLE LAWYERS RECOGNIZED AS PRO BONO PARTNERSHIP VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR

The Pro Bono Partnership has named two Robinson+Cole lawyers Pro Bono Partnership Volunteers of the Year for 2015. Peter A. Dagostine and Susan N. Masters were selected from a pool of approximately 350 volunteer lawyers across Connecticut. Peter and Susan were nominated because of their sustained, multiyear commitment to the Pro Bono Partnership, the high quality of their work, and their positive and professional attitude. They will be honored at a celebration on April 26, 2016.

Each year, the Pro Bono Partnership, which provides free legal assistance to nonprofit organizations serving the poor or providing other important social and community services in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, celebrates the commitment of a few special volunteers for their exceptional dedication. These volunteers are recognized for the complexity or transformative nature of a pro bono project in which they are involved, their extraordinary responsiveness, or the sheer volume of their matters or time committed to pro bono service through the Partnership. Peter and Susan are well deserving of the recognition.

#### **PETER KNIGHT HONORED WITH THE HONORABLE ANTHONY V. DEMAYO PRO BONO AWARD**

Pro Bono Partner Peter R. Knight is one of this year's recipients of the Connecticut Bar Association's Anthony V. DeMayo Pro Bono Award. The award is named in honor of the Honorable Anthony V. DeMayo, who tirelessly fought for fundamental fairness and championed the legal rights of the poor and accused. The award recognizes CBA members who volunteer for the Pro Bono Network. The recipients are selected based on their demonstrated dedication to providing legal services without expectation of payment to those in need. Peter was nominated by Lawyers for Children American (LCA), which provides legal counsel for children in neglect and abuse cases. A longtime LCA volunteer, Peter has teamed with numerous R+C lawyers in representing dozens of children throughout Connecticut. Peter will be recognized at the CBA's annual awards celebration on April 14, 2016.

#### **ROBINSON+COLE SETTLES RELIGIOUS RIGHTS LAWSUIT THAT ALLOWS CHURCH SOUP KITCHEN TO REMAIN OPEN**

After years of litigation and settlement negotiations, Robinson+Cole, led by lawyers Evan J. Seeman and Brian R. Smith, obtained a final settlement in favor of their client, St. Vincent de Paul Place. The settlement allows the soup kitchen that St. Vincent operates at the site of a former parochial school in Norwich to remain open. After local administrative hearings and three federal lawsuits, including a successful trip to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, Brian and Evan negotiated a favorable settlement that will allow St. Vincent to continue to remain open to provide food, shelter, and other support to hundreds of individuals in the Norwich area. The cases concerned our client's challenge to the City of Norwich's actions denying a special permit and use variance, as well as notices of violation that had been issued by the City. Under the settlement, the City will issue a special permit to St. Vincent to ensure that the poor and needy can receive necessary food and care. Other lawyers who have assisted in this matter include Kathleen E. Dion, Nuala E. Droney, Karla L. Chaffee, Sorell E. Negro, Kelly Frye Barnett, and Jonathan H. Schaefer. You can view an article about the settlement in [The Bulletin](#).

#### **ROBINSON+COLE HOSTS LAWYERS FOR CHILDREN AMERICA TRAINING SESSION**

Robinson+Cole hosted a Lawyers for Children America (LCA) training session for new volunteers in the Hartford office on February 25, 2016. All potential LCA volunteers are required to attend a training session for guidance in representing children in abuse and neglect cases in Connecticut's Juvenile Courts. Robinson+Cole has a long history and close ties with LCA. A number of our lawyers volunteer, and environmental and energy partner Joey Lee Miranda currently serves on LCA's Board of Directors.

#### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESTRAINING ORDER PROGRAM CONTINUES TO EXPAND**

Robinson+Cole's Domestic Violence Restraining Order (DVRO) Program continues to grow, expanding to other law firms and covering more towns in Connecticut. In November, the firm hosted a

groundbreaking training session for more than 35 lawyers interested in representing victims of domestic violence seeking restraining orders in Connecticut. The session, co-sponsored by the Connecticut Bar Association/Young Lawyers Section, offered guidance to lawyers at other firms who might be interested in developing their own pro bono domestic violence programs. Additionally, Robinson+Cole, whose program currently serves Middletown and New Britain, is looking to expand its reach in Stamford.

#### **FEDERAL COURT JUDGES THANK ROBINSON+COLE LAWYERS FOR PRO BONO SERVICE**

U.S. District Court Judges Janet C. Hall and Michael P. Shea each thanked Robinson+Cole lawyers Nuala E. Droney and James R. Nault for their representation of the plaintiff in *Ellerbe v. Jaison et al.* The case was assigned to Robinson+Cole by Judge Shea. Ellerbe was an inmate with the Connecticut Department of Corrections who alleged that two prison guards assaulted him and that his due process rights were violated at subsequent hearings. Jim and Nuala ultimately reached a favorable settlement on behalf of our client. Judge Shea wrote, "The Court depends on the contributions of the bar to assist it in ensuring that our justice system provides equal access and opportunity for all, and you have made a major contribution to this cause by your efforts in the Ellerbe case."

#### **ROBINSON+COLE RECOGNIZES LAWYERS WITH FIRM'S PRO BONO AWARD**

Robinson+Cole's Pro Bono Committee honored two of our lawyers for their extraordinary pro bono efforts in 2015 with the firm's Pro Bono Award. Nuala E. Droney, a litigation partner active on a variety of pro bono fronts, was honored for her role in taking on challenging cases referred through the federal court's Criminal Justice Act program, mentoring associates with these matters, and spearheading the firm's successful DVRO Program. Christie D. Jean, an associate in the land use group, was recognized for her role in handling several pro bono zoning appeal matters and her work with the Stamford Land Conservation Trust.

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#### **PRO BONO COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

[Peter R. Knight](#) | [Kenneth C. Baldwin](#) | [Karla L. Chaffee](#)

[Kathleen E. Dion](#) | [Edward J. Heath](#) | [Gregory J. Ligelis](#) | [Megan R. Naughton](#)

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