Pro Bono Matters

Miller Canfield has long been recognized within our communities for pro bono and community service efforts. We believe that the firm and its attorneys have an ethical responsibility to undertake pro bono engagements. Through an active pro bono committee, the firm seeks to create a culture where pro bono legal services are encouraged and where our professionals have ready opportunities to perform meaningful pro bono legal services.

Commitment

We encourage all of our attorneys to devote a minimum of 30 hours per year to pro bono legal services as mandated by the State Bar of Michigan or in lieu thereof to support pro bono agencies financially. The firm’s pro bono policy awards billable credit for a minimum of 100 hours of pro bono service annually as an incentive. We also enable our summer associates to each have a court appearance on behalf of a pro bono client and participate in pro bono activities in other ways.

Pro bono service includes the representation of low-income persons and organizations that provide assistance to low income persons; representations involving substantial civil rights and public rights issues, and serving nonprofit organizations where the payment of standard legal fees would significantly deplete the organization's economic resources or would be otherwise inappropriate.

Partners

The firm works in partnership with a number of organizations to facilitate pro bono opportunities for its professionals, including the American Civil Liberties Union, Lakeshore Legal Aid, Legal Services of South Central Michigan, Legal Aid of Western Michigan, Michigan Community Resources, Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, the Chicago Bar Foundation, as well as the referral programs of the various courts in which we practice. The firm is also responsive to interests of its attorneys in crafting and approving pro bono opportunities. Each year, the firm recognizes attorneys who exemplify the highest standard of pro bono and community service with the Richard J. Seryak Award. Each honoree is provided a stipend to designate to the legal service organization of his or her choosing.
Recent Efforts

- Representing individuals serving mandatory life sentences without parole for offenses they committed as juveniles
- Representing a class of immigrants to stop their immediate removal to Iraq without due process in the immigration courts
- Representation of fans of the band Insane Clown Posse to protect their constitutional rights to freedom of expression and association, and due process.
- Producing a guide for Election Day poll workers to encourage the attraction and hiring of qualified workers who are essential to the voting process
- Helping entrepreneurs and startups through a partnership with the Osborn Business Association and taking a leadership role in the annual Small Business Legal Academy
- Representing indigent people in criminal expungement proceedings to give them a new opportunity in life.
- Staffing divorce clinic for dozens of people seeking a new beginning of their lives.
- Working with Project Salute of the University of Detroit Mercy Law School to help veterans pursue veteran benefits.
- Working with the Accounting Aid Society to help indigent persons file income tax returns to receive the refunds and benefits to which they are entitled.
- Representing federal prisoners in prisoner's rights cases.
- Representing the Michigan State Bar Access to Justice program with respect to administrative legal issues.
- Winning two major housing discrimination cases on behalf of scores of plaintiffs.
- Assisting a number of community based non profits that serve low-income people with corporate, employment, real estate, tax and other organizational issues.

Recognition

Both individually and as a firm, Miller Canfield has been recognized as a leader in commitment to pro bono service. The firm has been honored in the State Bar of Michigan’s Pro Bono Circle of Excellence, as the “Law Firm of the Year” by Michigan Community Resources, and as Pro Bono Law Firm of the Year by the Legal Aid and Defender Association. We were also given the Distinguished Pro Bono Service Provider Award at the 2017 Detroit Community Development Awards.

Kim Scott, who has worked extensively on the Hamama case among many other pro bono efforts, was recognized as the national runner-up for Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year at the 2019 Chambers Diversity & Inclusion Awards. She was also selected to receive the prestigious State Bar of Michigan John W. Cummiskey Pro Bono Award, given annually to recognize outstanding pro bono service. Chairman Emeritus Thom Linn received the Michigan State Bar Foundation's 2018 Founders Award, which recognizes lawyers who exemplify professional excellence and outstanding community contributions. And Pro Bono Counsel Wendy Richards was named among Michigan Lawyers Weekly’s “Women in the Law” Class of 2018.