Pro Bono Service

Public service at Steptoe is an integral part of our history, ethos, and operations. The principle of increasing access to justice guides our pro bono efforts. Steptoe is a charter signatory to the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge, and was one of the first law firms to establish a position for a lawyer with full-time responsibility overseeing the firm’s pro bono program.

Many pro bono matters handled by Steptoe lawyers involve significant legal issues with far-reaching effects, such as race, age, gender, sexual orientation, and disability discrimination; human rights; freedom of speech; prisoners’ rights; and voting rights. We also assist local, national, and international nonprofit organizations that contribute to advances in fields like health, education, economic development, homelessness, and the environment. The firm likewise provides pro bono legal services to individuals in matters that include custody, adoption, domestic violence, guardianship, housing and homelessness, political asylum, immigration, education, consumer protection, public benefits, assistance to veterans, criminal records expungement, mental health, and tax.

Sampling of Pro Bono Matters

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights: Steptoe has filed amicus briefs in several different matters involving LGBT and same-sex marriage issues in the Supreme Court as well as lower courts. We assist college students experiencing mental or emotional difficulties in challenging involuntarily suspensions in violation of federal law. The firm also is involved in several efforts directed at protecting voting rights.

Community Economic Development: Steptoe is engaged in community economic development projects, such as ensuring the appropriate implementation of employment and housing requirements in local urban development ventures.

Criminal: The firm secured the release of an innocent man who had been on death row for decades, and we currently represent four other clients facing capital punishment. In addition, Steptoe assists survivors of sexual assault in protecting their rights throughout the prosecution of their assailant. The firm also represents clients seeking to have their criminal records expunged, and is defending protesters arrested during the last presidential inauguration.

Disability: Steptoe regularly works with clients suffering from disabling mental and physical health conditions to obtain public benefits crucial to their securing and maintaining housing, ensuring the availability of an adequate food supply, and other life necessities.

Education: Our lawyers represent parents of special needs students to ensure they receive services crucial to a meaningful education. Additionally, for more than two decades, the firm has had a partnership with an inner-city elementary school, and has provided a range of services, including tutoring, mentoring, and special enrichment activities.

The Elderly: Steptoe regularly assists elderly clients in negotiating a workable resolution of federal and local income tax problems, as well as in consumer and housing matters.

Environment: The firm works with environmental organizations to safeguard the integrity of various endangered habitats to insure compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

25,000+ hours donated in 2019
**Family Law:** We have a large docket of family law matters, including representing caregivers seeking to adopt or be granted guardianship of the children and incompetent adults in their care, and we represent clients in custody and domestic violence cases. Our lawyers also staff advice and referral clinics for pro se litigants in custody and child support cases.

**Housing and Homelessness:** The firm is an active participant in a housing right to counsel initiative, and has saved numerous low-income clients from eviction. Steptoe lawyers also regularly volunteer at homeless legal clinic intake sites.

**Human Rights:** Each year, Steptoe works to secure lawful immigration status for a significant number of foreign-born clients who have left their country of origin to escape political, religious, and other forms of persecution. We also represent children who are escaping parental abuse and victims of human trafficking and violent crime.

**Nonprofit Organizations:** Steptoe lawyers provide legal assistance to an array of groups whose missions focus on achieving advances in education, health, the environment, civil liberties, social action, animal rights, and the like.

**Tax:** In addition to the tax work on behalf of elderly clients mentioned above, we have partnered with nonprofit organizations in a variety of tax policy matters.

**Veterans:** Our lawyers help veterans suffering from service-related injuries and other medical conditions to obtain the kind of assistance from the Veterans Administration that they deserve.

### Awards and Recognition

**2020**
- Steptoe’s Chicago office was named to Public Interest Law Initiative’s 2020 Pro Bono Recognition Roster.

**2019**
- Steptoe received Washington Council of Lawyers’ 2019 Law Firm Award.
- Steptoe’s Chicago office was named to Public Interest Law Initiative’s 2019 Pro Bono Recognition Roster.
- Steptoe launched a new Housing Law Fellowship in conjunction with the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia.
- Steptoe’s Jennifer Bonneville has received the Los Angeles County Bar Association’s (LACBA) 2019 Hon. Benjamin Aranda III Outstanding Public Service Award for her work with the LACBA’s Domestic Violence Legal Services Project.
- Steptoe’s Lisa Arnold, Shaun Boedicker, Blanca Caceres, Joel Kaufman, David Hirsch and Rick Roberts received the Human Rights First 2019 Pro Bono Star Award.
- The *Chicago Lawyer* profiled Tony Hopp in an article titled “Where the Heart is: A Steptoe Partner Helps Families Keep Their Homes.” In the Q&A profile, Hopp discusses his work with the Lawyers’ Committee for Better Housing, an advocacy group and pro bono law firm that provides legal and supportive services to lower income renters to improve housing stability.
- Steptoe received Ayuda’s inaugural Pro Bono Impact Award for its “special and significant contribution to Ayuda’s legal pro bono program in 2018.”
- Steptoe received the 2019 Lex Mundi Pro Bono Foundation Award.
- Steptoe received the 2019 Voices of Courage award from the Women’s Refugee Commission.
- Steptoe received the 2019 “Outstanding Pro Bono Law Firm” award from the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law.
- Steptoe was honored for its “exceptional record of pro bono work in 2018” by the District of Columbia Circuit Judicial Conference Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Services at the annual “40 at 50” ceremony.
- Steptoe received the 2019 National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) award “in recognition of exception service, guidance and support to advance the mission of NPCA” as part of the NPCA annual Shriver Leadership Summit.

**2018**
Tony Hopp received the Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing 2018 Pro Bono Advocate Award for helping a low-income mother and her son vacate their lead-tainted Chicago apartment, recover damages from their landlord for lead poisoning, and secure a new apartment.

Steptoe donated numerous hours of pro bono legal services to support the Los Angeles County Bar Association’s Domestic Violence Legal Services Project.

John O’Connor was appointed to the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission’s high volume courts subcommittee due to his extensive pro bono work in the landlord tenant court.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an inter-faith civil rights advocacy organization committed to nonviolent action to achieve social, economic, and political justice, honored Susan Esserman with the Justice for Girls Empowerment Award for her work to assist survivors of human trafficking.

Steptoe received the 2018 Pro Bono Partner Award from DC Law Students in Court (LSIC) for the firm’s participation in LSIC’s expungement project.

SurvJustice, a Washington, DC-based nonprofit organization providing legal assistance, policy advocacy, and victim advocate services to victims of sexual assaults on college campuses, honored Steptoe with the Vanguard Award.

2017

The New York City Bar Justice Center selected Jasmine Campirides to receive its Jeremy G. Epstein Awards for Pro Bono Service.

The DC Housing Right to Counsel Project, established approximately a year ago, recognized John O’Connor with its first Outstanding Pro Bono Service Award.

2016

The ABA Death Penalty Representation Project honored Steptoe with its Exceptional Service Award.

At its 43rd anniversary celebration, Ayuda presented George Grandison with its Hall of Fame Award for his steadfast assistance to foreign-born clients struggling to resolve immigration problems.

2015

Forestdale, a well-regarded, 160-year-old nonprofit foster care agency, honored Mike Miller and Evan Glassman with its 2015 Cornerstone Award for the tremendous effort they devoted to successfully defending the agency against a baseless, though potentially devastating, lawsuit.

The John Carroll Society presented Steptoe with its 2015 Pro Bono Legal Service Award.

The Animal Legal Defense Fund recognized Steptoe with its 2015 Advancement in Animal Law Pro Bono Achievement Award.

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