



## PRO BONO At a Glance

APRIL 2013

### **R&C HARTFORD ATTORNEYS WIN BIAS JUDGMENT RULING FROM HOUSING COURT**

Robinson & Cole attorneys Brian R. Smith and Evan J. Seeman, along with the nonprofit Connecticut Fair Housing Center, represented a plaintiff described as a domestic violence survivor. A housing court judge ordered the owner of a Manchester, Connecticut, condominium to pay \$109,000 for illegally refusing to rent his unit to a woman armed with a state housing voucher. Vernon Oliver, judge of the Connecticut Housing Court, ruled that landlord Kenneth Burkamp's actions against the prospective tenant were illegal.

According to a recitation from court papers, Burkamp cited his reluctance to deal with the state in refusing to rent the unit to the plaintiff. During the trial, Burkamp was "far from contrite," papers said. Authorities said that the court ruling handed down in December included unspecified compensatory damages and attorneys' fees.

The award also includes a civil penalty against Burkamp for willful conduct, designed to deter other landlords from violating the fair housing laws. Burkamp, also a Manchester photographer, said that the five-year-old case "was a complete rip-off" and is under appeal.

### **AMANDA B. BARRY NAMED TO CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER BOARD**

The Children's Law Center of Hartford elected business litigation associate Amanda B. Barry to its Board of Directors. The organization works to protect the interests of indigent children in family court and advocates for policies that advance

### **MESSAGE FROM ED HEATH**

Last year, the Florida Bar launched a creative marketing campaign called "One: One Attorney, One Client, One Promise" to increase pro bono efforts.

The campaign promotes the idea that, if each member of the Florida Bar accepted one pro bono matter a year, it would be a substantial reduction in the enormous backlog of cases and a significant improvement in access to justice for all Florida residents. Leaders of the bench and bar in other states, including Connecticut and New York, are developing similarly themed campaigns, designed to remind lawyers of the power and importance of individual efforts. While we should be proud that our legal system allows unrepresented persons to vindicate their rights, we all have heard the horror stories of cases where the system failed or underperformed in a meaningful way. Each month our firm's lawyers conclude numerous transactional and litigation pro bono matters with positive results far better than what the clients would have achieved without the benefit of legal counsel. These matters are often the subject of articles in this newsletter. Florida has it right: one attorney, one client, one promise makes a difference.



### **LAWYERS FOR CHILDREN AMERICA TRAINING SESSION**

Robinson & Cole hosted a Lawyers for Children America (LFCA) volunteer training program on Friday, February 22, in its Hartford office. The training is mandatory for attorneys interested in taking on cases

their well-being and best interest. Through its programs and services, the Children's Law Center strives to create safe, stable environments for children whose parents are in chronic conflict.

### **PRO BONO PARTNERSHIP SELECTS BRITT-MARIE K. COLE-JOHNSON AS TOP VOLUNTEER IN 2012**



Britt-Marie K. Cole-Johnson, an associate in the firm's Labor and Employment Section, was selected by the Pro Bono Partnership as a top volunteer of the year. Ms. Cole-Johnson and four other individuals were recognized among a pool of nearly 1,000 volunteers from across the tristate area.

The Pro Bono Partnership provides free legal assistance to its clients, nonprofit organizations serving the poor or providing other important social and community services in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York.

### **PRO BONO PARTNER NAMED TO GREATER HARTFORD LEGAL AID BOARD**

Edward J. Heath, business litigation partner at Robinson & Cole, has been appointed to the Board of Directors for Greater Hartford Legal Aid (GHLA). Mr. Heath is also the pro bono partner at the firm. GHLA is a not-for-profit law firm whose attorneys provide clients living in poverty with free representation for civil issues .

### **STEVEN J. BOYAJIAN DEFENDS ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS IN COLLECTION MATTERS**

Steven J. Boyajian, a business litigation associate in the R&C Providence office, has undertaken the defense of several indigent elderly individuals in collection matters referred by the Rhode Island Bar Association's elderly pro bono program. The assets and income of these persons generally fall within the exemptions

for LFCA. Based in Connecticut, LCFA is a nonprofit child advocacy organization that provides pro bono legal representation to protect the rights of children who are victims of abuse, abandonment, and neglect.

Energy and utilities partner Joey Lee Miranda was elected in 2012 to LFCA's Board of Directors.

### **BOSTON R&C ATTORNEYS RECEIVE RECOGNITION FROM MIDDLESEX DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE FOR ASSISTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Since May of 2012, the Boston office of Robinson & Cole has been participating in a pro bono attorney program with the Middlesex District Attorney's Office (MDAO). This first-of-its-kind public and private partnership program between the MDAO and several Boston-area law firms provides free legal assistance to victims of domestic violence during the restraining order process.

Because a restraining order is a civil document, assistant district attorneys are unable to represent victims during that process. Many victims are unable to afford an attorney, as oftentimes it is the abuser who controls the household finances. These restraining order hearings are critical. They work not only to ensure that the abuser cannot come in contact with the victim but also frequently address other important issues, such as assuring continued child support, utility payments, mortgage payments, and health insurance coverage. To address this problem, the MDAO partners with law firms to identify victims and provide free representation. Since its inception, the program has served more than 100 victims, with a 97 percent success rate of cases resolved in favor of the victim.

To date, 54 attorneys have participated in the pro bono program, all of whom have received extensive training and support. Nine attorney mentors from legal services and private practice provide training, guidance, and technical assistance to the attorneys.

Kendra L. Berardi, a real estate litigation and title insurance associate in the firm's Boston office, was presented with the Middlesex District Attorney's 209A Pro Bono Initiative Award at a ceremony held in

provided by Rhode Island law and the Social Security Act respectively. Without representation, they are often convinced, through aggressive collection tactics, to pay debts out of otherwise exempt assets, leaving them with insufficient funds to pay for basic living expenses. In some circumstances, exempt assets are attached or garnished, as was the case with one of the firm's clients who, due to a dialysis appointment, was unable to attend a hearing on a motion to attach her bank account. In other cases, individuals may be intimidated into paying debt purchasers who cannot establish that they hold the claim they are asserting. With R&C's assistance, a complaint against an elderly woman was voluntarily dismissed at trial because the debt purchaser/plaintiff had failed to send a witness to establish that it was the holder of the asserted claim.

Woburn, Massachusetts, on January 10, 2013. The award is presented to an attorney who has dedicated time to helping victims of domestic violence through this partnership and program. Ms. Berardi was honored for her exemplary service to the Office of the Middlesex District Attorney and to victims of domestic violence.



Robinson & Cole attorneys John R. Bauer, Hiram B. (Ted) Carey III, Jason B. Curtin, and Elizabeth K. Wright have also represented victims of domestic violence through the pro bono program.

#### **2013 PRO BONO COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- Kenneth C. Baldwin
- Nicole A. Bernabo
- Pamela K. Elkow
- Christopher F. Girard
- Edward J. Heath
- Gregory J. Ligelis
- Megan R. Naughton
- Christopher S. Pitt

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