Pro Bono
Since its founding more than 100 years ago, Covington has been committed not only to the highest professional standards of representation but also to public service. The firm’s pro bono program has long been acknowledged as preeminent in the legal community—our work is anchored in providing legal assistance to people and organizations of limited means in our surrounding communities, and we frequently take on challenging matters that affect the most vulnerable clients and address broader systemic issues and public rights.

Top 10
For 29 of the past 32 years, including 11 years at number one.

Anchored in Service
“Covington regards pro bono service as a professional obligation of each firm lawyer—with the privilege we all have as lawyers comes a responsibility to give back.”
—Doug Gibson, Partner and Firm Chair

Powered by Volunteers
At Covington, pro bono is encouraged but voluntary. In 2020, 94% of our lawyers volunteered their time to work on a diverse range of pro bono matters.

Committed to Excellence
“Pro bono work is heavily promoted and encouraged. The firm goes to the mat for its pro bono clients.”
—Covington associate

Driven by Impact
Generations of Covington lawyers have recognized and deployed the power of pro bono to advance the cause of justice and rule of law in our own communities and around the globe.

Changing Lives
“Pro bono cases are the saving grace for people who would otherwise not have a chance.”
—Brian Ferguson, pro bono client
2020 At-a-Glance

178 Hours
#1 Highest Average Pro Bono Hours for U.S. Firms

Top 3 Firm
The American Lawyer's Pro Bono Ranking

Pro Bono Hot List

1,408
Active Firmwide Pro Bono Matters

5%
Pro Bono Institute Pro Bono Challenge—the firm devotes at least 5% of billable hours to pro bono work

1,200+
Covington Lawyers Who Volunteered on a Diverse Range of Pro Bono Matters

100%
U.S. Associate Pro Bono Participation

221,000+
Pro Bono Hours
Increasing Access to Civil Justice

Lawyers across our offices represent low-income individuals, families, and communities in high stakes civil matters implicating basic human needs, such as shelter, safety, health, public benefits, and wages. Covington’s engagement in civil legal aid is central to the impact we seek to have in our local communities and to ensuring fairness in our justice system.

Civil Legal Aid Rotations
Each year, eight associates and two paralegals are assigned to work for six months at local legal services organizations, Bread for the City, Children’s Law Center, and the Neighborhood Legal Services Program, where the firm pioneered the loaned associate model in 1969.

Secure and Healthy Housing
Covington lawyers across the country represent low-income tenants facing eviction or seeking to remedy deplorable housing conditions, to stabilize their housing and prevent homelessness.

Our Washington, DC lawyers take part in a citywide Housing Right to Counsel Project, which aims to dramatically reduce evictions by guaranteeing pro bono representation for tenants in subsidized housing who are sued in landlord/tenant court. The Project is part of a national movement to advocate for a right to counsel in civil legal matters where basic human needs are at stake.

34,000+
Pro bono hours devoted to civil legal aid matters in 2020

“Eviction functions as a cause, not just a condition of poverty.”
Matthew Desmond
Author of Evicted

Pro Bono Video:
Securing Access to Justice for DC Residents
Covington’s over 50-year partnership with Neighborhood Legal Services Program.
Advancing Equality and Fighting Discrimination

The firm is deeply committed to ensuring that marginalized people and communities are not denied equal rights—it is at the core of our pro bono work. We are on the cutting edge of civil rights work, often serving as counsel in matters making national headlines.

Preserving Representative Democracy
After an eight-day bench trial, Covington secured a nationwide injunction prohibiting the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 Census. Representing 20 individuals living in areas with high numbers of Latino and non-citizens, Covington established that the U.S. Department of Commerce’s citizenship question threatened to cause a disproportionate undercount, leading to unequal legislative representation and unfair reductions in federal funding.

We also successfully argued that the Commerce Secretary’s addition of the citizenship question was arbitrary and capricious, in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act, and were pursuing an Equal Protection claim when the Administration finally agreed to submit to the injunction. Coordinating with parallel New York and California litigation, Covington played a key role in reversing the Secretary’s ill-conceived and unlawful action and protecting the integrity of the Census.

100,000+
Pro bono hours devoted to racial justice issues in the past two years
Reforming America’s Criminal Justice System

The firm has a longstanding commitment to defending the rights of individuals whose liberty is threatened by the government. This work accounts for a substantial proportion of the firm’s pro bono practice and is at the core of our pro bono practice and values.

Fighting Racial Profiling in Policing
Covington has led systemic class action cases seeking to end the racially discriminatory police practice of stop & frisk in Milwaukee and New York City. In Maricopa County, AZ, we challenged the sheriff’s use of pretextual traffic stops targeting the Latino community. We achieved successful outcomes in all three cases. We are currently co-counseling with the Center for Constitutional Rights to challenge traffic checkpoints targeting Black drivers in Buffalo, NY.

Advocating for Safe and Humane Prisons
Covington has a long history of holding prison systems accountable for inhumane treatment of prisoners, with a focus on prison populations which are particularly vulnerable. In 2020, we settled a 35-year long class action seeking to redress conditions in the juvenile justice system in Washington, DC.

With local public defender offices, the firm has defended hundreds of indigent criminal defendants
Defending the Environment

In our pro bono work, we represent a number of innovative environmentally-focused organizations. Many of these clients collaborate with governments, corporations, and local communities to advance the health of our planet, offering our lawyers the opportunity to promote environmental sustainability and support efforts preventing deforestation, addressing climate change, and expanding renewable energy.

Protecting Public Lands
Covington represents conservation and scientific organizations in a lawsuit challenging the President’s authority under the Antiquities Act, a 1906 public lands conservation statute, to reduce the size of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah. The use of the Antiquities Act to reduce the size of a national monument is unprecedented, and the plaintiffs have sued the Trump Administration for acting outside of its statutorily delegated authority.

Increasing Energy Access in Africa
OnePower Lesotho is an energy startup and social enterprise focused on bringing electricity to underserved communities across the developing world. Covington lawyers helped OnePower submit suggested amendments to improve Lesotho’s renewable energy mini-grid market. Mini-grids involve small-scale electricity generation and offer a cost-effective solution for electrifying rural communities.

Lifetime Achievement Volunteer Award

The Nature Conservancy

COVINGTON
Safeguarding Human Rights

The firm’s work to defend human rights worldwide is a significant component of our pro bono program. In the United States, our lawyers seek to reform the criminal justice system, including advocating against mass incarceration and defending against the use of capital punishment.

Outside the U.S., the firm’s support for human rights transcends borders and includes extensive collaboration with international organizations on matters advancing peace, rule of law, and access to justice. We also advise hundreds of NGOs focused on improving access to food, water, healthcare, education and economic opportunity in the world’s poorest regions.

Promoting International Peace and Rule of Law
For over a decade, Covington lawyers across all offices have supported Public International Law and Policy Group (PILPG), a global pro bono law firm which provides legal and policy advice to state and non-state entities in regions affected by conflict, helping the organization in its mission to promote peace, rule of law and effective post-conflict governance.

In recent years, the focus of Covington’s work with PILPG has centered on projects across the Middle East and North Africa. Covington has advised PILPG on counseling policy-makers, government officials, and civil society groups on significant and historic projects tackling the region’s rapidly evolving legal landscape.

Enforcing Workers’ Rights
Covington represented labor unions in an arbitration proceeding with a global fashion brand to enforce workers’ rights to safe working conditions in garment factories under the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety.

In 2018, the firm reached a favorable $2.3M settlement on behalf of the unions.

21 Guantánamo detainees represented since 2004
Protecting Refugees and Immigrants

Preserving DACA
For the last three years, Covington partnered with our client the University of California in an effort to save the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which protects the ability of hundreds of thousands of young immigrants to live, work, and study in this country without fear of arrest and deportation. In June 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling in favor of DACA, accepting Covington’s arguments that the Administration broke the law when it rescinded the program. Listen to a recorded discussion of this historic result.

Kids in Need of Defense—UK Program
Since 2017, our London office has partnered with Kids in Need of Defense’s UK program, successfully securing leave to remain in the U.K. on behalf of dozens of children and helping them take steps towards greater family stability.

140+ Individual immigration cases in 2020

“To be in court standing up for 700,000 immigrants, I don’t know that there’s anything quite like that. For them, it’s not a legal case. It’s about whether they get to be Americans.”

Jeffrey Davidson, Partner

Key Impact Areas
- Travel Ban
- DREAMers
- Unaccompanied Minors
- Asylum Seekers
- Human Trafficking Victims
- Sanctuary Cities
Racial Justice

We have intensified our efforts to combat racism and promote social justice through our pro bono efforts. Over the last two years, the firm has spent over 100,000 hours on racial justice matters. A few matters are highlighted below, please also see this more complete summary of recent and current racial justice matters.

**Fighting Housing Discrimination**
In Detroit, we successfully challenged racially discriminatory tax foreclosures that victimized African-American homeowners for years following the Great Recession. In Connecticut, we have filed a lawsuit alleging HUD and local housing authorities violated the law by relocating subsidized housing tenant families in a manner that perpetuated segregation in North Hartford.

**Holding Police and Prosecutors Accountable**
For many years, Covington has partnered with the Innocence Project New Orleans to recover millions of dollars in damages on behalf of individuals wrongfully convicted due to Brady violations and other governmental misconduct in Louisiana, where the criminal justice system is deeply marred by racially motivated injustices.

**Removing Public Symbols of White Supremacy**
With the Washington Lawyers’ Committee, we represented the NAACP to sue to remove the names of Confederate generals from two public schools in Virginia. With the Southern Poverty Law Center, we also authored an amicus brief supporting efforts to cover a Confederate memorial in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Key Impact Areas**
- Reforming the Criminal Justice System
- Fighting Racial Profiling
- Advocating for Fair Housing
- Closing the Civil Justice Gap
- Protecting Voting Rights for People of Color

Led class action cases seeking to end stop & frisk in Milwaukee and New York City
Advancing LGBTQ+ Rights

2020 Highlights

With Lambda Legal, the firm represents the Indiana Youth Group and multiple students in a lawsuit to protect the interests of transgender students.

A Food, Drug and Device team assisted Whitman-Walker Health to successfully advocate for revised FDA blood donation recommendations for men who have sex with men.

Through Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund, New York lawyers assist multiple clients to secure a legal name change, an important step to making their legal identities match their lived experience.

On behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the firm filed an amicus brief supporting the successful injunction of an Arkansas law, which would have prohibited health care providers from providing gender-affirming care to transgender adolescents, and also filed similar briefs in support of gender-affirming policies at educational institutions.

We successfully secured asylum for immigrants facing LGBTQ+ discrimination in their home countries.

Protecting Transgender Service Members’ Rights to Serve in the Military

On behalf of the ACLU and six transgender U.S. service members, Covington challenged the Administration’s ban on transgender military service members on the grounds that it violates equal protection and substantive due process.

“As a veteran, I have tremendous respect for all individuals who ask only for the opportunity to serve their country. The least I can do is utilize my legal training to fight for them against this policy’s discrimination, which undercuts—not advances—national security.”

Peter Komorowski, Associate

5,300+
2020 pro bono hours on LGBTQ+ matters
Women and Girls’ Empowerment

Protecting Reproductive Choice
Our firm is committed to protecting women’s rights to family planning and reproductive health services. We have provided legal advice and collaborated on impact litigation with U.S. organizations. We also work to advance access to family planning globally and have advised numerous global health nonprofit organizations on navigating the U.S. Government’s Global Gag Rule restrictions on funds used for abortion services.

Expanding Access to Opportunity for Women Entrepreneurs
Since 2002, the firm has provided legal support to FINCA International, a nonprofit that fights poverty through financial inclusion offering credit to entrepreneurs in underdeveloped countries, thereby enabling low-income families to create their own solutions to progress. FINCA’s work focuses on economic empowerment for women, helping to correct global social and political practices that leave women and their children vulnerable.

Representing Domestic Violence Survivors
Across our offices, Covington represents domestic violence survivors in obtaining civil protection orders or restraining orders that keep them safe from their abusers. Domestic abuse cases have risen worldwide in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the firm has staffed a hotline to advise domestic violence survivors on filing for emergency CPOs or seeking other legal help.

Through Her Justice, our New York lawyers represent low-income immigrant women who have survived gender-based violence to seek immigration relief under the Violence Against Women Act and through applications for U-visas.

Importantly, such immigration relief provides work authorization and employment—especially important for victims of violence, for whom a job is not only a source of livelihood but a way to escape abuse.

Key Partner Organizations
- Center for Reproductive Rights
- DC Volunteer Lawyers Project
- Family Violence Appellate Project
- Feminist Majority Foundation
- Her Justice
- National Women’s Law Center
- National Partnership for Women and Families
- Planned Parenthood
- Tahirih Justice Center
Supporting Nonprofits and Entrepreneurs

We represent hundreds of community-based organizations, global NGOs and small businesses on a wide range of matters, including corporate governance, intellectual property, corporate formation, and employment law. In doing so, we help these clients better fulfill their missions and expand their reach.

Reforming Criminal Justice through Journalism
The Marshall Project is an award-winning nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization dedicated to covering America's criminal justice system. Covington attorneys provide TMP with media law advice, including on First Amendment, FOIA, copyright and privacy issues. Through our work, we help further TMP’s mission to “strive to educate and enlarge the audience of people who care about the state of criminal justice.”

Supporting Crisis Intervention for LGBTQ+
We provided corporate governance and operations advice to The Trevor Project to support its mission of providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ+ young people.

Pro Bono Video: Empowering Youth Through Sports
Covington’s work for Up2Us Sports strengthens local communities.
Standing Up for Veterans

The firm has a long and deep commitment to serving veterans. In 2006, Covington was instrumental in securing the right of veterans to have legal representation in benefits appeals pending before the Veterans Administration. In our current veterans practice, we work with the National Veterans Legal Services Program to represent individual veterans in their benefit cases, as well as to advance legislative and litigation initiatives to protect and expand veterans’ access to benefits.

**Historic Class Action Victory for Veterans**
Together with the National Veterans Legal Services Program, this landmark petition challenged the inexcusable delays by the Veterans Administration in processing appeals of veterans’ benefits denials and provided class-wide relief to veterans. This is the first ever class action certified before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

**Launching Careers of Veterans Advocates**
Since 2013, the firm has co-sponsored with Northrop Grumman four two-year fellowships focused on veterans advocacy. Through Equal Justice Works, recent law school graduates designed an initiative to address an unmet legal need in the veterans community.

Representing hundreds of veterans appealing denials of VA medical benefits and seeking to upgrade military discharge status
Key Pro Bono Contacts

Pro Bono Team

Firmwide
- Kelly Voss

Washington
- Jill Garcia

New York / EMEA
- Mary Burner

California / Asia
- Dia Omasonte

Covington’s Public Service Committee Leaders

Washington
- Alan Pemberton
- Seth Tucker
- Susan Cassidy

New York
- David Haller
- Bruce Bennett

California
- Ingrid Rechtin
- Anupam Sharma
- Mitch Kamin

London
- Morag Peberdy