

Pro Bono

COVINGTON

BEIJING BOSTON BRUSSELS DUBAI FRANKFURT JOHANNESBURG LONDON
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Pro Bono at Covington

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. We frequently take on challenging matters that affect the most vulnerable clients and address broader systemic issues and public rights.

Top 10

For 31 of the past 34 years, including 12 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 2023, 95% of our lawyers volunteered their time to work on a diverse range of pro bono matters.

Committed to Excellence

“The firm goes to the mat for its pro bono clients.”
—Covington associate

Changing Lives

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

2023 At-a-Glance



174 Hours

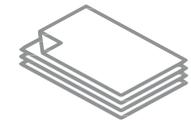
Average Pro Bono Hours per
U.S. Lawyer

Ranked #1

The American Lawyer
Pro Bono Scorecard (U.S.)

Innovative Lawyers Award

Europe - *Financial Times*
Representing Ukraine Pro Bono at
the ICJ



1,400+

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



234,000+

Pro Bono Hours

Key Practice Areas

Criminal Justice



- Indigent Defense
- Police/Prosecutor Misconduct
- Prison Conditions
- Innocence
- Death Penalty
- Juvenile Justice
- Victim Advocacy

Human Rights & Rule of Law



- Protecting Activists
- Guantánamo Detainees
- Post-Conflict States
- Rule of Law
- Child Labor and Worker Safety
- Human Rights Accountability
- Unlawful Arrest and Detention

Civil Legal Aid



- Housing
- Domestic Relations
- Education
- Elder Law
- Health
- Public Benefits
- Immigration

Civil Rights



- Democracy and Voting Rights
- Fair Housing
- Immigrants' Rights
- Public Accommodations
- Disability Rights
- First Amendment
- Criminal Justice Reform

Non-Profits and Enterprise



- Governance
- Employment
- Litigation
- Investigations
- IP Protections
- Social and Microenterprise

Women and Girls' Empowerment



- Education
- Reproductive Rights
- Sex and Pregnancy Discrimination
- Harassment and Violence
- Human Trafficking

Veterans



- Disability and Medical Benefits
- Discharge Upgrades
- Access to Counsel
- Class Action Rights
- Naturalization for Immigrant Servicemembers

LGBTQ+



- Marriage Equality
- Transgender Rights
- Transgender Name Changes
- Policy and Legislation
- Students and Education

Gun Violence Prevention



- Executive Action
- Crime Gun Data Access/ FOIA
- Public Health Policy
- Bad Apple Dealers
- Straw Purchaser Liability
- Second Amendment Litigation
- Gun Safety Legislation

Environment



- Climate Change
- Nature Conservation
- Green Travel
- Protecting Public Lands
- Renewability/Sustainability

Media Freedom



- Nonprofit Newsrooms
- Pre-publication Review
- Newsgathering
- Protection of Journalists & Media Freedom Defenders
- Global Advocacy to Preserve & Expand Media Freedoms

Racial Justice



- Voter Suppression
- Racial Profiling in Policing
- Challenging the Travel Ban
- Removing Confederate Memorials
- Criminal Justice Reform
- Students and Education

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.



Pro Bono Video:

Securing Access to Justice for DC Residents

Covington's over 50-year partnership with Neighborhood Legal Services Program.

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.

35,000+

Pro bono hours devoted
to civil legal aid matters
in 2023

Secure and Healthy Housing

In Washington, our 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.

In California, we worked with several co-counsel organizations to achieve a landmark settlement in 2023 with the California Department of Housing and Community Development regarding the State's administration of its Covid-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program. The settlement provides a renewed chance for more than 100,000 California households struggling with pandemic rent debt to receive critical rent relief funding from the State.

“Eviction functions as a cause, not just a condition of poverty.”

Matthew Desmond
Author of *Evicted*

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.



Advancing Disability Rights

We recently **filed a federal lawsuit** with the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Ohio to challenge HB 458, an Ohio law that limits how voters with disabilities can cast absentee ballots. Our lawsuit challenges these restrictions which place an unlawful burden on voters with disabilities and seek to criminalize voter assistance.

Combating Housing Discrimination

In **Detroit**, we successfully challenged racially discriminatory tax foreclosures that victimized African-American homeowners for years following the Great Recession.

Protecting Voting Rights and Democracy

Our voting rights practice aims to support the right of all voters to have equal access to vote and be counted. Our work has included cases challenging voter suppression policies and practices that disproportionately affect communities of color.

We also secured a nationwide injunction prohibiting the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 Census, establishing that it could cause a disproportionate undercount, particularly for Latinos and non-citizens.

Key Impact Areas

- Democracy and Voting Rights
- Fair Housing
- Public Accommodations
- Disability Rights
- First Amendment



Reforming America's Criminal Legal 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.



Pro Bono Video: 11 Years to Freedom

Brian Ferguson turned to Covington to help him fight for his freedom.

With local public defender offices, the firm has defended **hundreds** of indigent criminal defendants.

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.

Reforming Inequitable Bail Practices

With the ACLU, we led a federal lawsuit in Michigan and negotiated a historic settlement with the 36th District Court in Detroit to ensure that people are not jailed in violation of the Constitution because they cannot afford bail. The settlement marks progress in the fight to change bail practices across the country that disproportionately impact poor people of color. The reforms outlined in the settlement are seen as a model for other cities that wish to create a usable framework.

Key Impact Areas

- Indigent defense
- Defending against the death penalty and wrongful convictions
- Ending mass incarceration
- Prisoners' rights
- Juvenile justice
- Fighting the criminalization of poverty
- Reforming unfair bail practices

Justice
Potter
Stewart
Award



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

In 2017, the prior administration cut the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument's protected areas in half. Covington brought suit that same day on behalf of Grand Staircase monument-focused groups. After four years of litigation, the Biden administration agreed to restore the monument to its full boundaries and protections.



Increasing Energy Access in Africa

OnePower Lesotho is an energy startup and social enterprise focused on bringing electricity to underserved communities across the 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 

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Safeguarding Human Rights & the Rule of Law

The firm's work to defend human rights worldwide is a significant component of our pro bono program. In the U.S., our lawyers seek to advocate against mass incarceration and defend against the use of capital punishment.

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

21 Guantánamo detainees represented since 2004

Advancing the Rule of Law

The firm represents Ukraine against the Russian Federation in the International Court of Justice. The ICJ application we filed took President Putin's allegations that Ukraine was committing genocide in eastern Ukraine and turned those allegations against him. This approach opened a legal avenue to hold Russia accountable for its violations of international law, and the order that we secured for Ukraine has been relied upon by the United Nations, the Group of Seven, and others as part of broader accountability efforts.



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We advised Acid Survivors Trust International, a non-profit tackling acid violence worldwide, on reporting obligations of companies that manufacture, distribute or use acid in their supply chain and on acid legislation. We conducted a multi-jurisdictional analysis of laws and frameworks, including relating to business and human rights and environmental and chemicals laws, to produce a supply chain due diligence guidance tool for use as a best practice in the industry.

Waging Justice with the Clooney Foundation

Covington partners with the Clooney Foundation for Justice (CFJ) to protect human rights around the world and seek justice for the most vulnerable – survivors of atrocities, women, minorities, LGBTQ+, journalists, and democracy defenders. Covington provides pro bono support to a variety of CFJ's projects, and has sent associates on full-time pro bono secondments to CFJ, providing additional capacity for CFJ in carrying out its mission.

Protecting Refugees and Immigrants

Preserving DACA

For many 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 the U.S. 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](#).

“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

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 and citizenship on behalf of dozens of children and families, helping them take steps towards greater family stability and security in the UK.

190
Individual immigration
cases in 2023

Marvin E.
Frankel
Award

Key Impact Areas

- Challenging the Travel Ban
- DREAMers
- Unaccompanied Minors
- Asylum Seekers
- Human Trafficking Survivors



human rights *first*

American ideals. Universal values.

Racial Justice

We work to combat racism and promote social justice through our pro bono efforts. Over the last two years, the firm has spent over 94,000 hours on racial justice matters. A few matters are highlighted below; also see a more complete [summary of recent and current racial justice matters](#).



Fighting Racial Profiling

We led systemic class actions 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](#).

Challenging Racially-Motivated Wrongful Convictions

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.

94,000+
Pro bono hours devoted
to racial justice issues in
the past two years

Advancing LGBTQ+ Rights

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 each year in securing legal name changes, an important step to making their legal identities match their lived experience.

We lead an effort by the American Academy of Pediatrics and more than 20 other leading medical organizations that are pushing back against multiple states' bans on gender-affirming care for transgender adolescents. We have filed amicus briefs in approximately a dozen state and federal courts. These briefs serve to educate the courts about the science supporting gender-affirming care for adolescents with gender dysphoria.

Defending LGBTQ+ Rights Before the Court of Justice of the European Union

With the International Lesbian and Gay Association Europe, Covington represented a Polish film editor in fighting for the protection of LGBTQ+ self-employed persons from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. As a result of our case, the CJEU set an important EU-wide precedent that sexual orientation cannot be a reason to terminate or not renew a contract with a self-employed worker.

 **10,200+**
2023 pro bono hours on
LGBTQ+ matters



Presidents Award for Outstanding Service –
Recognizing our work supporting legal challenges to bans on gender-affirming medical care

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."

-Covington associate



Women and Girls' Empowerment

Protecting Reproductive Choice

Our firm is committed to protecting women's rights to family planning and reproductive healthcare. 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.



Global Women's Rights Courage Award

For work to ensure access to safe and legal abortion

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.

With [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. This relief can provide work authorization and employment, helping survivors escape abuse and find economic stability.

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
- Sanctuary for Families
- Tahirih Justice Center



Supporting Nonprofits, Social Enterprises, & Entrepreneurs

We represent hundreds of community-based organizations, global NGOs, small businesses, and social enterprises 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.



Pro Bono Video:
Empowering Youth Through Sports
 Covington's work for Up2Us Sports strengthens local communities.

Advising Underserved Entrepreneurs

We partner with **Start Small Think Big** to provide corporate and transactional pro bono assistance to underserved entrepreneurs. Start Small Think Big refers low- to moderate-income small business owners, often minority and/or women entrepreneurs, for advice on legal issues related to their small businesses.

Supporting Small UK Charities

We advise many smaller UK charities through the LawWorks Not-For-Profits Programme, providing advice on matters ranging from commercial contracts to real estate. The scheme gives our lawyers the opportunity to use their skills and expertise to advise charities that would not otherwise have the means to obtain legal assistance, and allows these organizations to put the funds saved towards their missions and frontline services.

550+
 Pro bono matters
 supporting nonprofits,
 social enterprises, and
 small businesses worldwide



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.

Representing **hundreds** of veterans appealing denials of VA medical benefits and seeking to upgrade military discharge status

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.



**Pro Bono Firm of the Year
for 2018**



**Pro Bono Mission Partner
of the year in 2022**

Advancing Media Freedom and Protecting Journalists



Through the **Kurt Wimmer Media Freedom Pro Bono Initiative**, we undertake a broad range of matters aimed at protecting media freedom across two pillars: protecting and advancing media freedom

and the safety of journalists, and advising nonprofit newsrooms on media law and operational issues.

The Wimmer Initiative was launched as a tribute to our late partner, **Kurt Wimmer**, an international leader in media law who was deeply committed to his pro bono practice focused on protecting journalists and advancing free press.



The American Lawyer's Tony Mauro Media Lawyer Award (2023)

For our pro bono work supporting the First Amendment and free expression.

Criminal Justice Reform through Journalism

The Marshall Project is an award-winning nonprofit news organization covering America's criminal justice system. We provide TMP with media law advice, including on First Amendment, FOIA, copyright and privacy issues, helping them "educate and enlarge the audience of people who care about the state of criminal justice."

Defending Nonprofit Newsrooms

We obtained the **dismissal of a meritless defamation case** against the Center for Investigative Reporting, which was affirmed by the Ninth Circuit. The case is an example of the troubling trend of deep-pocketed interests seeking to silence journalists with meritless litigation.

Protecting Journalists

The Philippines government subjected journalist Maria Ressa to numerous criminal charges after her digital media company published exposés regarding the administration's human rights abuses. Since 2019, Covington has represented Ms. Ressa in Washington in coordination with lead international counsel Amal Clooney and Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC.



The Nobel Committee awarded Ms. Ressa the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize for her "efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition to democracy and lasting peace."

Key Pro Bono Contacts

Pro Bono Team

Firmwide



Kelly Voss

Washington



Jill Garcia



Danielle Moise

New York



Mary Burner

California



Dia Omasonte

EMEA/Asia



Staś Kuźmierkiewicz

Public Service Committee Leaders

Washington

Maureen Browne
Susan Cassidy
Alan Pemberton
Julia Post
Seth Tucker

New York

Bruce Bennett
David Haller

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Jeff Kiburtz
Ingrid Rechtin
Anupam Sharma

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