

2018 Pro Bono Snapshot

"We educated, privileged lawyers have a professional and moral duty to represent the underrepresented in our society, to ensure that justice exists for all, both legal and economic justice."

– Associate U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor

Pro bono work is deeply rooted in our firm's history and culture. Equal access to justice is fundamental to a fair and equitable society, and the responsibility to create access to justice for the underrepresented has sustained our dedication to pro bono work for generations. Often those most in need of legal representation are the least able to afford it, which is why we have dedicated legal resources and tens of thousands of hours to a multitude of causes since our founding in 1890. Our focus on pro bono clients in San Francisco and the Bay Area allows our attorneys to have direct impact on the lives of people in the areas in which they live and work. As Justice Sotomayor mentions, the work to balance the scales of justice is our duty, but more importantly, at Coblentz, it is our privilege.

Partner Organizations

Coblentz is proud to be affiliated with a number of local and national organizations to offer important pro bono assistance, including:

American Civil Liberties Union

Bankruptcy Pro Bono Project

California Lawyers for the Arts

Clean Slate Program

Constitutional Rights Foundation

High School Mock Trial Program

Housing Negotiation Project

Justice & Diversity Center

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights

Legal Aid at Work

Legal Services for Children

Legal Services for Entrepreneurs

Right to Civil Counsel

Second Chance Legal Clinic

Swords to Plowshares

2018 Pro Bono Highlights

By The Numbers

3,441	hours dedicated to pro bono firm-wide
25	new pro bono matters taken on
63	total pro bono matters Coblentz attorneys worked on
76%	of our attorneys committed time to pro bono matters
73	attorneys participated in pro bono matters

Veteran's Claim to Benefits

Coblentz attorneys represented a Vietnam army combat veteran in his appeal before the Court of Appeal for Veterans Claims (CAVC) for service-connected benefits for PTSD. Our client claimed he was entitled to 100% disability payments from at least the date he had been forced to stop working because of his PTSD. The VA disagreed, insisting instead that he only became 100% disabled much more recently, ignoring substantial evidence to the contrary. In conjunction with Swords to Plowshares, we appealed to the Court of Appeal for Veterans Claims and obtained a reversal and remand of the VA's decision. This remand order recovered a substantial settlement of retroactive benefits for the veteran, depending on the VA's determination of the claim's effective date.

Victory for Young Immigrant

Coblentz attorneys represented a young woman from Central America in a Federal Tort Claims Act case filed in coordination with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California. The plaintiff alleged she was assaulted by a U.S. Border Patrol agent while being held in the Border Patrol's custody. Coblentz and the ACLU obtained a six-figure settlement for the client, who plans to use the money to attend college in California.

Clinics for Local Nonprofits

Coblentz hosted a facilities and real estate training for Bay Area nonprofits in conjunction with the Justice & Diversity Center (JDC) as a component of its "Community Organization Representation Project" or CORP. We also hosted a follow up clinic attended by five local nonprofits, which also served an intake function for the JDC in evaluating eligibility and need for placement of the nonprofits with full scope pro bono representation.

GTMO Trial Observations

A Coblentz partner traveled for a second time to Guantánamo Bay as a civilian observer and member of the Pacific Council on International Policy's GTMO Task Force, to observe the hearings in the *United States v. Khalid Shaikh Mohammed ("KSM"), et al.* The hearings involved key issues of whether defense counsel would be permitted to conduct their own investigation into the interrogation and torture of defendants. This evidence could be crucial to determining the credibility of witnesses and evidence at trial, and would be used as mitigating evidence during the sentencing phase of the military trial. The prosecution opposes the request because the investigation would reveal the identity of CIA and other personnel. The Task Force compiles their observations of the trial into reports and recommendations.

Help for Domestic Violence Victim

Coblentz attorneys won a domestic violence restraining order for a client through the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County. The restraining order provided our client police protection should her batterer, an ex-boyfriend who had subjected her and her children to physical and emotional abuse for over two years, attempt to contact or come within 100 yards of her.

Housing Negotiations

Coblentz attorneys regularly volunteer for the Housing Negotiation Project, where they represent low-income clients facing eviction. In the past year, we have assisted multiple clients, including helping a family whose primary wage earner is suffering from cancer and no longer working in obtaining a full waiver of back rent plus an additional three months for the family to stay in the home while looking for replacement housing, and helping a tenant to stay in his single occupancy hotel room after he fell behind on rent while recovering from a violent beating and robbery in the Tenderloin.

American Citizen Imprisoned in Egypt

Coblentz attorneys are representing Moustafa Kassem, an American citizen who has been imprisoned in Egypt since 2013 when he was arrested in Nasr City, Egypt while running an errand during a protest against the military coup. The 52-year-old father and resident of New York has been held for more than four years without any official verdict or sentence. Our representation was mentioned in articles appearing in HuffPost and The Intercept. Citing the press coverage, we convinced Congressman Peter King to request that Vice President Pence raise Mr. Kassem's case during his visit with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.