

2019 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."

– 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 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

Centro Legal de la Raza

City Arts & Lectures

Clinic by the Bay

Community Housing Partnership

Community Organization Representation

Project (CORP)

Constitutional Rights Foundation

High School Mock Trial

Girls Leading Girls

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

Pro Bono Highlights

2019 By The Numbers

- 3,031** hours dedicated to pro bono firm-wide
- 27** new pro bono matters
- 69** total active pro bono matters
- 71%** of our attorneys committed time to pro bono matters

Significant Achievements

All the Way to the Supreme Court

A Coblentz attorney represented a man who was in county jail, awaiting trial, when a prison guard attacked him. After successfully defeating the county's quest for qualified immunity in a Ninth Circuit appeal, the matter was set to go to trial. The county then filed a petition for certiorari with the Supreme Court. Our attorney became a successful Supreme Court advocate, convincing the Court in a clear and compelling brief not to take the case.

Criminal Justice Act Defense

Coblentz attorneys took on two "Criminal Justice Act" federal criminal cases. In both cases, the defendants would otherwise have been unable to afford representation. In both cases, our attorneys were successful in navigating a complex and opaque pretrial system to secure fair and reasonable resolutions for our clients.

Standing up for Eviction Rights

Coblentz attorneys represented a low-income client facing eviction from his home. When settlement negotiations faltered, they prepared the case for trial in short order. On the day of trial, they leveraged a favorable settlement for the client.

Tax Relief for Medi-Cal Recipient

A Coblentz attorney assisted a taxpayer in a tentative favorable settlement of a tax court case involving Medi-Cal payments. We were able to persuade the IRS to accept the client's claim and offer a large concession.

Removing Obstacles to the Transgender Community

Coblentz partnered with the Transgender Law Center to host a free name and gender marker change clinic where our attorneys helped clinic participants with the process of identifying and completing the correct forms to complete a legal name and gender change. Our work helped participants overcome one obstacle in a complicated bureaucratic process.

Continuing to Fight for Disabled Veteran's Benefits

In 2018, a Coblentz attorney secured a substantial award of back pay for a disabled veteran, in conjunction with Swords to Plowshares. Although under an order to pay, the VA continued to delay, and the client still didn't have his money. After months of our continued relentless efforts into 2019, the VA finally paid the substantial settlement of retroactive benefits for the veteran.

Debt Relief from Bail Bond Companies

Coblentz attorneys staffed the "Our Fair Chance" legal clinic put on by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, where we assisted individuals saddled with unmanageable debt from for-profit bail bond companies following encounters with the criminal justice system and negotiated with bail bond companies for debt reduction or relief.