



Vinson & Elkins

Established 1917

PRO BONO

2017

“We have long been committed to providing legal services to our community, and to those who cannot afford legal counsel. This work is a privilege and a hallmark of our profession.”

– T. Mark Kelly, V&E Chairman

Pro Bono work is both a privilege and an obligation of our profession. This theme is what inspires V&E lawyers to donate nearly 30,000 hours annually to pro bono activities. Ranging from individual reunions of parents and children, to complex corporate governance of non-profit organizations serving our most vulnerable, at every level, V&E lawyers dedicate themselves to improving the communities in which they live and work – this is the impact we strive to make.

FROM INDIVIDUAL MATTERS

SCOTT WALKER CLEMENCY

For seven years, V&E represented Scott Walker in connection with his application for federal clemency. Scott spent nearly 20 years serving a life sentence for a non-violent drug offense. In partnership with co-counsel at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius and Professor David Slotnick, Scott was able to walk out of prison, a free man.

In 1996, Scott was arrested, charged, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison for his role in transporting small amounts of marijuana and methamphetamine from Arizona, to sell in Illinois to support his drug addiction. Prior to this conviction, Scott had never before been convicted of a felony, and he had never served any time in prison, but he faced a life sentence under then-mandatory federal U.S. Sentencing Guidelines. Although the U.S. Supreme Court declared the guidelines to be non-binding in 2005, the high court's ruling was not retroactive, meaning Scott did not benefit from this decision.

Scott's lawyers worked tirelessly to fight for his release. His clemency petition, despite support from the sentencing judge, the media, and various civil rights organizations, went unanswered. When the U.S. Sentencing Commission began retroactively reducing penalties for non-violent drug offenses, Scott's lawyers saw an opening to move to correct his sentence. This motion was granted, which resulted in Scott's immediate release from custody, after spending the last 20 years believing that he would never be released.



From left to right: Darin Schultz (V&E), Scott Walker (V&E Client), Christina Vitale (Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP) outside of the courthouse.

IMPACTING OUR MOST VULNERABLE...

FAMILY LAW MATTERS

Through one of V&E's legal service provider partners, Mr. H came to V&E to seek joint custody of his 5-year-old daughter with her mother. During the representation, the child's mother, Ms. O, revealed secret plans to move to California with their child. In addition to the secret plans to relocate, in an effort to discredit Mr. H's plight for a relationship with his daughter, she made false child abuse allegations against Mr. H. Given these facts, Mr. H faced having to seek full custody of this child in order to preserve his relationship with her.

Despite Ms. O's efforts, after a full trial, Mr. H was granted full and permanent custody of his daughter.

VETERANS MATTERS

For many years, V&E has operated a robust Veteran's Initiative, representing Veterans and Servicemen with a variety of legal needs, including benefit appeals. Mr. M was one of these Veterans. After serving in the U.S. Navy following WWII, Mr. M was medically discharged for swelling and synovitis in his knees. Years later, he developed arthritis in his right knee. VA medical examiners determined that a service-related injury did not cause the arthritis, so the VA would not provide medical benefits for his arthritis. After numerous appeals, Mr. M found himself before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and, through a partnership with a Veterans legal service provider, V&E agreed to represent him.

Through tireless advocacy, V&E lawyers convinced the Court that, because a prior agency had held that Mr. M did not have a pre-existing knee injury, the VA was not able to consider any evidence related to said injury. The VA ultimately agreed to a joint remand, which allows for Mr. M to secure a new medical examination. In order to decide Mr. M's benefits, the medical examiner will be instructed that Mr. M did not suffer from a pre-existing injury; this allows for consideration of Mr. M's ongoing symptoms. This cleared the major obstacle for Mr. M obtaining the benefits that he deserves.

IMMIGRATION MATTERS

Immigration work is a large part of our pro bono program. In 2013, V&E client Mr. X fled El Salvador to escape gang threats and violence. His father was a leader in one of the gangs, and, as a result, he faced repeated death threats, which eventually escalated to physical violence. He was living in Maryland for three years with his partner and young son and a daughter on the way. Last spring, he was detained by ICE and scheduled for removal. V&E took on his representation through a legal service provider partner.

After a full hearing, in which ICE counsel thoroughly challenged our client's credibility, the Judge ruled from the bench. She found Mr. X credible and that the V&E lawyers had satisfied all of the elements for relief. Within a few days after the hearing, Mr. X was released from ICE custody and was able to witness the birth of his daughter. Without adequate representation, not only would Mr. X have missed the birth of his child, but he would have been removed from the United States and placed in grave danger in his home country.

"A dedication to Pro Bono Work drives the Firm's attorneys and is deeply engrained in our culture. We strive diligently to be great citizens, as well as great lawyers."

– Harry Reasoner, V&E Pro Bono Chair

TO COMPLICATED TRANSACTIONAL MATTERS FOR NON-PROFITS SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES...

HARDEMAN HOSPITAL MATTER

For two years, V&E represented Hardeman County Hospital District in a Chapter 9 Bankruptcy. After a contested confirmation hearing, the United States Bankruptcy Judge overruled the objection of some creditors and approved the Plan of Adjustment, meaning that the hospital would be able to emerge from bankruptcy.

While the legal aspects were complicated, and provided a great deal of professional experience for our bankruptcy lawyers, the real significance is the impact of the emergence on the town itself. This hospital is vital to the town of Quanah (population 2500) and the people of Hardeman County

(population 4000). It is one of the largest employers, and the only available healthcare in the area, with the next hospital being 80 miles away.

The courthouse was full of the residents of Quanah, who came by bus to the Federal courthouse in Dallas, to attend the confirmation hearing in hopes that the hospital would emerge from bankruptcy. The attendees in Court included the County Judge, County Commissioners, the Mayor, the entire hospital board, members of the school board, members of the economic development board, and numerous hospital employees. The impact of the work was felt immediately in the courtroom and in the town of Quanah.



Michael Gibson in front of the GNDC-Jeremiah Program Moody Campus building.

GUADALUPE NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (GNDC)

Since 2011, V&E has represented GNDC, an Austin-based non-profit providing affordable housing to families in East Austin, in its joint venture with Jeremiah Program, a Minneapolis-based non-profit that supports single mothers with housing and childcare services while they pursue a career-track college education.

The preliminary phase of the joint venture was completed in 2013, when GNDC agreed to allow Jeremiah Program to lease four duplexes owned by GNDC in East Austin. In this novel collaboration between two non-profits, V&E helped GNDC enter into an agreement with Jeremiah that governs the rights and obligations of each.

Following the initial phase, with V&E's representation, GNDC and Jeremiah planned and negotiated a larger-scale project on the same property. The new project is the construction of a 35-unit, mixed-use building on the property that will provide low-cost housing, community childcare, and life skills classes under one roof for Jeremiah Program participants. The building is also located near the campus of a local college, allowing Jeremiah Program participants to pursue their career-track degree while they are part of this supportive community. The project is funded by a combination of donor funds and a forgivable loan from the City of Austin.

TO SUSTAINABLE SIGNATURE PROJECTS

TEAP

V&E helped facilitate a partnership between the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Section of the State Bar of Texas to create TEAP, a program to assist pro se indigent respondents, who find themselves facing a hearing in front of the administrative agency. Lawyers, both at V&E and outside of V&E, have the opportunity to opt-in to represent these respondents. These matters will give the lawyers experience in front of an agency and an area of law relevant to their paying practice while also giving representation to those who would otherwise be faced with appearing without counsel.

DFS WILL-A-THON & GENERAL CLINICS

V&E sponsored a Will-A-Thon for the Professional Women's Group of Dress for Success Houston, an international non-profit that empowers women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support, professional attire, and the development tools to help women thrive in work and in life. V&E lawyers, V&E alumni, and Marathon Oil lawyers met with clients, drafted end-of-life documents, and then executed said documents for more than 30 women, many of whom are single mothers and responsible for other family members. In the coming year, V&E has plans to hold general civil intake clinics, in partnership with Houston Volunteer Lawyers, to help the Professional Women's Group with a variety of personal legal needs.



V&E lawyer Christine Mainguy executes a will for her client at Dress for Success Houston.



GNDC-Jeremiah Program Moody Campus building nearing completion.

ASSISTED DECISION-MAKING CLINIC

To enhance V&E's thriving Guardianship Project, through a partnership with Disability Rights Texas, V&E hosted Texas' first Assisted Decision-Making Clinic. During the last legislative session, the Texas legislature passed House Bill 39, making Texas the first state to codify viable alternatives to a traditional court-ordered guardianship. The number of Texans with appointed guardians has increased by 60% since 2011 and is expected to skyrocket in the over-65 population and with transition-aged youth. The issue with these guardianships is that they are typically a long and arduous litigation process and are often too restrictive for what is necessary for the individual.

While the traditional guardianship is incredibly important for those who need it, it does not work for a large and growing segment of the population. In May of 2016, V&E lawyers assisted 19 families, who have children with less restrictive disabilities, in obtaining the proper information and paperwork, aligned with the new assisted decision-making statute, which will help guide them and their children in the appropriate manner. Another such clinic is planned for May of 2017.

SBLA & VIRTUAL LEGAL LABS

On two occasions in the past two years, V&E, the Association of Pro Bono Counsel (APBCo), and the City of Houston have joined forces to host a Small Business Legal Academy at South Texas College of Law. More than 100 businesses participated in each of the two academies, in which they attended workshops on employment, liability, and tax, and then met individually with Houston's corporate lawyers from law firms all over the city. These businesses obtained crucial information necessary to protect and grow their small businesses.

As a result of the success of these events, and the obvious need for this type of assistance in the small business community, V&E, APBCo, and the City of Houston launched the Virtual Legal Labs. On a monthly basis, small businesses have an opportunity to have virtual office hours, via Skype, with corporate lawyers from V&E. These lawyers give guidance on corporate structure, tax, intellectual property, and real estate issues.



Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, City of Houston Office of Business Opportunity Director Carlecia Wright, and V&E Pro Bono Counsel Ellyn Josef celebrate a successful Small Business Legal Academy.



Small businesses learn from experts during the Small Business Legal Academy coordinated by V&E Pro Bono Counsel and other stakeholders.

V&E lawyer Ali Choate counsels a small business at the Small Business Legal Academy.

V&E alumni and lawyers staff a Saturday Houston Volunteer Lawyers Clinic. Pictured: Page Robinson, Chris Bacon, Megan Savage, Alumni John Thomas, Jackson O'Maley, Austin March, Robert Landicho.

JOIN US

These matters and projects are only a fraction of the pro bono work that amounts to V&E's pro bono program. We continue to strive every day to serve those in need in our communities. We hope that you will join us in this mission, and partner with us on any of these or other yet undeveloped programs. Collaboration and partnership enhance our resources and allow us to do more.

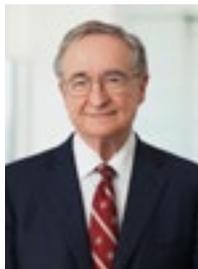
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