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# TRAILBLAZERS

## PLAINTIFFS' LAWYERS

### CYNTHIA VREELAND WILMERHALE



**PIONEER SPIRIT** While focusing her practice on patent and trade litigation, Cindy Vreeland is also active in pro bono human trafficking cases. "It's a horrible problem across the globe. And while I like to think my community in Boston is immune, Massachusetts General Hospital has a clinic devoted to young victims of sex trafficking. That underscores how huge the problem is, even in our own country."

**TRAILS BLAZED** Vreeland successfully represented Lisa Ricchio in one of the first sex trafficking cases filed against a motel under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Ricchio was brought to a motel in Seekonk, Massachusetts, by a man who pretended to be her boyfriend and held for nearly a week where she was beaten, raped and force-fed drugs and alcohol. "Lisa felt strongly that the couple running the motel was part of the deal. She tried to escape multiple times. On the first night, she ran into the woman running the hotel but was ignored." Vreeland focused on the secondary liability provisions of the TVPA, arguing the civil liability extended to others who benefit from the trafficking. "There are two requirements in a case like this. One, the victim has to show the business knowingly benefited financially, and two, there is some level of culpability by the business." With the successful settlement, Vreeland set several precedents under the TVPA, followed by trafficking victims across the U.S. filing similar suits against hotels.

**FUTURE EXPLORATIONS** Vreeland believes there will continue to be litigation related to hotel negligence in sex trafficking cases. "There's a lot of focus in the hotel industry on this issue with many trying to make sure trafficking doesn't happen on their premises. But the TVPA is designed to hold others who don't pay attention to what happens on their premises accountable."