
DC Office Hosts Children's Law Center Breakfast

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On April 16, the firm's Washington DC office hosted the [inaugural event](#) in the [Children's Law Center's](#) 2015 Breakfast Series. Speaker [Melody Barnes](#)—former director of the White House Domestic Policy Council—challenged an audience of more than 50 lawyers and business leaders to think about "disconnected youth" in their communities in a new way. She asked, what if children from disadvantaged backgrounds, cut off from the conventional paths to success, could instead be transformed into "opportunity youth," their talent and grit integral to the United States' role in the global economy?

It was a fitting topic for the Children's Law Center (CLC), an organization that plays a role in public policy advocacy and that, in the last year alone, helped more than 5,000 children and caregivers in DC's poorest neighborhoods create more stable families and gain access to quality health care and education. WilmerHale was also a fitting venue, reflecting the firm's strong involvement with the CLC, which, since 2000, has grown and flourished under the leadership of Executive Director Judith Sandalow.

Over the past decade, WilmerHale lawyers have taken on a steady stream of CLC pro bono cases—including four new cases in the past year—working to help secure safe and supportive home environments for the children who fall within CLC's purview. "For me, CLC's mission, assisting disadvantaged and neglected children, couldn't be a more important one," says Partner [Brent Gurney](#). "It's a great opportunity to apply our courtroom skills to help these children, and to assist CLC, which is a very dedicated and effective advocate for children."

Counsel [Brenda Lee](#) became involved with CLC in her first year at the firm, when she took on a case on behalf of an aunt seeking permanent guardianship of her two young nephews, against a family background of substance abuse. The aunt, who had provided the first loving, stable home these children had known, needed legal assistance before the DC Family Court. "We submitted briefs and other court papers and put on an evidentiary hearing, including examining two witnesses and moving supporting evidence into the record. The court found that guardianship with our client was in the best interests of the children," says Lee. "It was extremely gratifying to see the system work and to see that we can help."

Recently Lee, who is now a member of CLC's [Advisory Board](#), secured another pro bono victory for a

CLC client in a case that went to trial in December 2014. That case was supervised by Partner [Joel Green](#), who also plays a key role in the firm's relationship with the organization.

Gurney and Lee helped host the April 16 event, along with Litigation Department Chair [Howard Shapiro](#) and wife Shirley Brandman, who was formerly on the Board of Education for the Montgomery County Public Schools; Partners [Elizabeth Mitchell](#) and [Kim Parker](#); and Pro Bono Counsel [Chris Herrling](#). The event attracted a number of firm clients that are also supporters of CLC, as well as a cross-section of DC's legal and business community.

The CLC Breakfast Series, which features a range of luminaries speaking on trends in health education and child welfare, will continue throughout the year, hosted at various DC venues. The next event, on June 3, will feature Dr. Mark McClellan, former commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration and former administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Both Lee and Gurney also urge interested lawyers to consider CLC's list of pro bono opportunities. "It's a great chance for lawyers to get involved in the community and show their skills," says Gurney.

"You don't need to feel the pressure to take on something on a massive scale," says Lee. "You can make a difference for individual children, one at a time."