

Firm Lawyers and Staff Receive Above & Beyond Award from Community Partner Sanctuary for Families

2013-10-24

On October 23, [Sanctuary for Families](#)—the leading provider of services, both legal and non-legal, to survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking and their children in New York—honored WilmerHale attorneys with the Above & Beyond Award for Excellence in Pro Bono Advocacy. The award is given each year to attorneys for outstanding pro bono representation. Two teams of WilmerHale attorneys were recognized for their incredible resourcefulness and expert advocacy on behalf of survivors in both a Hague Convention case and a contested same-sex matrimonial action.

Associate Andrea Dreyer was honored for her oral advocacy and work in lengthy and contentious depositions related to the representation of a client in a same-sex contested matrimonial case. Dreyer's client was a victim of domestic violence who was battling his batterer for custody. In its decision finding in favor of Dreyer's client, the Court used a statement from Dreyer's papers highlighting that domestic violence is a mandatory statutory consideration in determining custody. Her meticulous preparation and equanimity under pressure were critical in eliciting financial information that will be crucial to resolving this contentious case in a way that fully protects her client and his son.

Partner Sanket Bulsara; Counsel Jacob Press; Senior Associate Tamar Kaplan-Marans; Associates Maria Banda, Musetta Durkee and Jing-Li Yu; and Project Assistant Ben Baker were honored for their exemplary efforts in a recent Hague Convention matter in the Southern District of New York. The client in this case, an indigent victim of domestic violence and mother of two children, was sued by her husband under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. The Hague Convention, to which the US and Italy are both parties, is designed to "to secure the prompt return of children wrongfully removed to or retained in any Contracting State," and "to ensure that rights of custody and of access under the law of one Contracting State are effectively respected in the other Contracting States." The husband had alleged that the client wrongfully retained the children in the US and sought an order returning them to Italy. The district court denied his petition for removal of the children from the US.

The firm and Sanctuary have a strategic partnership that is unique and has reached the lives of many New York-based domestic violence survivors. WilmerHale has long provided pro bono legal

services to an array of nonprofits and individual clients and charitable support to numerous legal aid organizations but was looking for a community partnership that all its staff could support. Joining forces with Sanctuary in 2010, WilmerHale has exercised its [unique philanthropy model](#), one that brings an office-wide focus and energy to a relationship with a single nonprofit. While many of WilmerHale's lawyers focus on representing Sanctuary's clients in court, the firm's work with Sanctuary goes beyond pro bono legal services and financial support. Lawyers, secretaries and support staff work side by side throughout the year devoting resources, time and energy in support of Sanctuary's Economic Empowerment Program, Children and Youth Services Program and additional programs across the agency.