

# Beacon of Justice

*Elevating* racial justice

*Disrupting* systemic disparities



2021  
Awardees





**BEACON OF JUSTICE**  
**2021 Awardees**

**The total number of Pro Bono  
hours for racial justice & equity by  
2021 Beacon of Justice winners:**

**273,829+**

**N**LADA is delighted to recognize the 2021 Beacon of Justice winners for their pro bono work and other efforts to advance racial equity. The Award recognizes firms that elevated the work of racial justice in 2020. This includes a wide spectrum from civil rights and special relief motions related to COVID that have racial significance, to advocates raising their voices and committing resources, to untangling systems that are inherently unjust.

These firms are vital partners in the NLADA community's endeavor to dismantle racial inequities and injustices. We look forward to our continued collaboration to eliminate systemic racism in our nation and congratulate the winners for their achievements and commitment to equal justice.

Twenty-three firms qualified this year showing the depth of commitment of the private bar to difficult issues related to racial equity. What follows are examples of this work from each of the 2021 Beacon of Justice Awardees:

**Watch the 2021 Beacon of Justice award video at:**

<https://youtu.be/waOC1pnphqw>

**Cover:** *People light candles next to statues of the pioneering Black athletes Jackie and Mack Robinson during a vigil in Pasadena, CA in May, 2020. **Opposite:** George Floyd's death sparked renewed racial justice efforts across the nation. Photos by Andrew Cullen*





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**“We remain committed to developing pro bono opportunities and initiatives aimed at the eradication of individual and systemic racism in all of its forms.”**

**— Steve Schulman**

**Pro Bono Partner, Akin Gump**

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# Akin Gump

STRAUSS HAUER & FELD LLP

**A**kin Gump’s commitment to racial justice is highlighted by several key pro bono matters from 2020.

After the adoption of compassionate release legislation in Washington, D.C. during the pandemic, Akin Gump teamed up with several organizations including the DC Public Defender Service to create a program to secure compassionate release for prisoners who are vulnerable to COVID-19. Akin attorneys and staff have managed the intake process and have successfully advocated for the release of several prisoners susceptible to COVID-19. In an effort to involve more pro bono attorneys in this life-changing work, two key attorneys on these cases, Amanda McGinn and Zara Shore, published a roadmap in *The National Journal* for how attorneys can use their skills and resources to ensure convicted felons across the country are not denied the right to vote.

In another innovative project, Akin Gump partnered with the Georgetown University Law Center’s Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (“ICAP”) to assist localities in developing strategies to deal with armed militias that were engaging in intimidation of racial justice protesters and voters. The team helped ICAP advise localities, and led a team of national law firms conducting research and drafting templates for potential emergency litigation during the presidential election.

As we continue to reflect on the racial justice events that transpired in 2020, Akin Gump will remain focused on our commitment to justice and the core principles that have guided our work since the founding of our firm 75 years ago.

[Watch Akin Gump’s video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)

**“This has been a challenging year and our Firm responded in a meaningful way that can help make a difference. We look forward to what we can achieve together in 2021.”**

**— Mark M. Katz**

**Partner, Arent Fox**

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**Arent Fox**

**A**rent Fox launched the [Arent Fox Center for Racial Equality](#) in June 2020, an organization dedicated to advancing racial justice by using legal, policy and advocacy tools to help create a more fair and equitable society. The Center’s essential goals focus on initiating change at work, in the law, through education, in policy and in the community. In 2020 82 Arent Fox employees volunteered over 1,600 hours of their time to numerous causes, including working with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and We The Protesters/ Police Officer Union.

Arent Fox assisted the Washington Lawyers’ Committee with racial disparities research in connection with traffic stops. The project included collecting all existing information, assessing prior research and reports, identifying

potential sources for interviews and working with the Committee to engage other advocates.

On behalf of the NAACP LDF Litigation Project, Arent Fox attorneys conducted legal research, drafted complaints and prepared temporary restraining order/preliminary injunction materials for 10 target states. They provided NAACP LDF with model filings for the 10 target jurisdictions to extend polling site hours, extend the time and date by which ballots can be received and provide and accept ballots by email. Attorneys and staff conducted nonpartisan remote pre-election news monitoring in Alabama and Mississippi. Volunteers were divided into three groups to conduct monitoring through social media, traditional sources and official sources. They spotted issues including voter suppression and misinformation and reported them to LDF.





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**“We are all better when we work together to strive for more, fight for better and settle for nothing short of equitable access to justice for all.”**

**— Angela Vigil,  
Pro Bono Partner and Executive  
Director of Pro Bono Practice,  
Baker McKenzie**

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# Baker McKenzie.

**I**n 2020, Baker McKenzie’s pro bono practice launched and participated in a number of initiatives aimed at addressing racial disparities through the protection of children’s rights, ensuring equal opportunity voting and combating racism. Despite challenges brought on by the pandemic, our pro bono practice had an increase in participation across a number of initiatives and projects.

With the global pandemic exacerbating inequities in our communities, our pro bono practice responded by launching and engaging in meaningful and innovative projects to address critical social justice and health challenges.

Baker McKenzie volunteers are creating city-specific guides to help citizens who come in contact with law enforcement understand what

the police can and cannot do according to the law. This project is focused on big cities where black and brown children, youth and adults engage with the police more often and with dangerous results. It will include consideration of the law relevant to the particular jurisdiction.

In December Baker McKenzie hosted 2020 Vision: Examining Child Rights through an Anti-Racism Lens, focused on youth of color and explored the impacts of racism in our justice systems. During the virtual event, in-house counsel, children’s rights advocates, academics and experts, law firm lawyers and young people themselves engaged in candid discussions and interviews to examine critical questions related to how children can overcome legal challenges and overcome barriers to children’s rights (i.e. access to housing, shelter, job security and criminal justice).

**“Our lawyers feel fortunate that they can use their skills and expertise on pro bono matters to promote racial justice.”**

**— Susan M. Hoffman, Partner,  
Crowell & Moring**

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**A**s part of its efforts to counter systemic racism, Crowell & Moring launched its Racial Justice Pro Bono Task Force and committed to provide \$1 million in pro bono legal services in 2021 to advance racial equity and justice. The Task Force focuses on four primary areas: police misconduct; voting rights; ending mass incarceration; and socioeconomic equality - homelessness and housing. The Task Force's work builds on the firm's preexisting work in these areas that resulted in several successes in 2020.

C&M represented residents of Baltimore's Harlem Park in a federal lawsuit against the Baltimore City Police, which charges that their rights were violated during a six-day, multi-block police lockdown of their neighborhood during the investigation of a shooting that was later determined to be a suicide.

In Alabama, C&M sought to prove that at-large judicial elections violated Section 2 of the VRA by diluting the voting power of African-American citizens. In February, the 11th Circuit ruled on the critically important state sovereignty issue holding that private plaintiffs may continue to bring suits against states under the VRA when they racially discriminate against voters.

The firm has worked to address flaws in the criminal justice system which have a disproportionate impact on individuals of color. C&M made an increased commitment to assist prisoners with parole hearings and compassionate release motions, handling seven cases in 2020. C&M has been successful in obtaining the release of four clients to date.





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**“Our hope is that by sharing this important effort with the broader legal community, we encourage colleagues and peers to join us in fighting the disproportionate impact of unfair prison sentences on communities of color.”**

**— John Gleeson, Litigation Partner, Debevoise & Plimpton**

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# Debevoise & Plimpton

**I**n 2016, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP started a pro bono initiative called The Holloway Project. Named after a case that Debevoise partner John Gleeson presided over while a U.S. District Judge, the Project set out to obtain relief for incarcerated men who were subjected in racially discriminatory fashion to the cruelest mandatory sentences in the federal system: the enhanced, mandatory consecutive sentences imposed pursuant to “stacked” firearm convictions under 18 U.S.C. 924(c).

In 2020, lawyers at the firm spent 8,862 hours working on Holloway client cases and appeals. There are currently 48 clients, five active appeals, 26 active district court cases, and over 40 prospective clients in the intake phase. The vast majority of our clients, including those released, are Black men. In total, we have saved

our clients almost 615 years of prison time so far.

In addition to these direct representations, The Holloway Project engages in advocacy relating to these racially disparate mandatory minimum sentences, and works with other advocacy groups to affect policy changes. We have also partnered with Families Against Mandatory Minimums and Federal Defenders around the country to identify additional worthy clients, as thousands of men were subjected to these now-defunct mandatory sentences. Finally, the Project is working on re-entry initiatives for Debevoise clients and others released from lengthy prison terms, including support in employment and education.

[Watch Debevoise's video about the Holloway project here.](#)



**“Dechert has worked hard to contribute to the positive resolution of issues surrounding racial justice through the work of our pro bono program. This award solidifies our focus on racial justice issues and goal of effecting systemic change.”**

**— Stephanie Schlatter, Pro Bono Manager, Dechert**

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# Dechert LLP

**D**echert is honored to receive the Beacon of Justice award. The firm has worked hard to contribute to the positive resolution of issues surrounding racial justice through the work of our pro bono program by protecting the right to vote, advocating for the health of those incarcerated, securing women’s access to reproductive health, uncovering racial disparities in policing, and providing assistance to hundreds of small businesses and nonprofits struggling as a result of the pandemic. Receiving this award solidifies our focus on racial justice issues and Dechert’s goal of effecting systemic change.

For the past year, a team of Dechert attorneys has been working with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights to develop a national database on police use of force. Called Accountable Now, this database is a national

repository that collects use-of-force data from law enforcement agencies across the U.S. As an open-source database designed for the general public, Accountable Now makes it easier for the public to examine racial and other demographic disparities in how their cities are policed. As Lynda Garcia from the Leadership Conference explained: “Accurate data is critical to revealing the disproportionate impact police violence has on communities of color. To fix a problem, you need to know how extensive it is. Accountable Now will help communities stay informed, push for real reform and help to dismantle systemic racism in policing.” To date, Dechert has filed over 200 public records requests to police departments around the country seeking information.

[Watch Dechert’s video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)





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**“Through seamless collaboration, we have been able to quickly marshal our firm resources to take action to address social unrest, voter rights, education and housing deltas, among other issues.”**

**— Raymond Williams, National Diversity & Inclusion Partner, DLA Piper**

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**D**LA Piper has long been devoted to racial justice and we, like many others, have reflected on how we can deepen that commitment in the past year.

The firm is proud to be a part of the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, an historic collaboration between law firms to address systemic racism through pro bono work. We also are working to grow our pro bono work in four areas: voting rights; economic justice, including representing minority-owned small businesses, nonprofits that serve people of color, and tenants facing evictions; juvenile and criminal justice; and education.

Since the start of the pandemic, DLA Piper has engaged over 150 volunteers, and devoted

nearly 7,000 hours to assisting people who are incarcerated and have serious medical conditions. This work advances racial justice not only because of the disproportionate minority representation in our carceral system, but also because of the disparate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color. Those incarcerated have been hard hit by the virus. “Not only did the firm take cases and provide essential representation and advocacy, it dedicated significant resources to the pro bono effort by investigating and screening cases so that we could place those with the most urgent need. DLA Piper demonstrated the best of the profession at a time of crisis,” said Jonathan Smith, Executive Director of Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs.



*EBG's compassionate release efforts were led by Melissa Jampol and Eric Moran, Members of the Firm in the Health Care, Litigation and Employment practices.*

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## EPSTEIN BECKER GREEN

**A**t Epstein Becker Green, we believe in the transformative power of pro bono and community service work—for both our clients and our professionals. The opportunity to connect and make a difference in a personal way is a privilege that enriches our lives and invigorates our practice. Our commitment to giving back is as strong and varied as the needs of our communities. For more than 40 years, we have provided legal, financial, and other resources to resolve disputes and champion causes involving criminal law, financial rights, immigration rights, military affairs, education, tenants' rights, and more.

In May 2020, EBG began a partnership with the National Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys, Families Against Mandatory Minimums, and Women's White Collar Criminal Defense Association to represent indigent federal prisoners who are especially vulnerable

to COVID-19 due to serious medical conditions and who are predominantly people of color. The Compassionate Release Project addressed a critical need at a key time.

At EBG, diversity and inclusion have always been Core Values. We reaffirm our dedication to these essential parts of our culture by confirming both our intolerance of racism wherever it may occur and stating that the lives taken, and the lives of those still facing the injustice of racism, matter deeply to us. Our nation's pledge includes the words "with liberty and justice for all." At EBG, we want to see that pledge fulfilled. We appreciate the opportunity, through the Compassionate Release project to address systemic racial disparities.

[Watch Epstein Becker Green's video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)





**“We helped nonprofits and Black and minority-owned small businesses obtain federal funding to keep them in operation during the pandemic.”**





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**“In a year of seemingly endless challenges, our attorneys came together with a diverse group of nonprofit partners and clients to promote racial justice and work to dismantle systemic racism in our legal system, policing and broader communities.”**

**— Katie Marquart, Partner & Pro Bono Chair, Gibson Dunn**

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## GIBSON DUNN

**I**n 2020, Gibson Dunn reaffirmed its commitment to tackling racial justice and equity issues, including by recommitting to pro bono matters that directly address systemic racism and racial justice, such as police reform, criminal justice reform, equity in education and healthcare, and much more.

In June 2020, President Barack Obama published shared the link to a milestone community-based policing report and toolkit created by the Leadership Conference Education Fund, based on the work of over 160 Gibson Dunn attorneys who researched best practices and recommendations to reform policing in collaboration with community advocates and law enforcement experts.

Building on this experience, Gibson Dunn launched a new Police Reform Task Force, which is reexamining a variety of critical issues,

including dismissal policies, police unions, transparency, and excessive militarization of police.

In 2020, attorneys from offices across the United States also reviewed case files from the Innocence Project to determine whether DNA testing could prove innocence and ultimately exonerate the defendant. Finally, our lawyers also jumped into action to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted communities of color. For example, we partnered with Start Small Think Big (“SSTB”), a nonprofit focused on providing pro bono legal assistance to under-resourced small businesses, most of which are minority- and/or women-owned. In 2020, our attorneys assisted more than 200 small businesses across the country on over 650 distinct legal issues; over 75% of those small business owners were persons of color.

**“We look forward to continuing to ‘walk the walk’ of our commitment to make information and advocacy accessible for all, standing shoulder to shoulder with small business owners as their dedicated legal counsel.”**

**— Anna Dodson, Partner,  
Goodwin Procter**

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**G**oodwin has broad engagement in pro bono work addressing racial disparities, including work impacting low-income and vulnerable individuals, families and nonprofit organizations impacted by racial inequity or combatting it. Some of our efforts address systemic equity, such as working with a nonprofit focused on training teachers, while our inclusion efforts include supporting a nonprofit preparing African-American men for technology careers. We combat racism and prejudice by working with a nonprofit addressing the polarization of viewpoints on political, social and economic issues and institutional racism through impact litigation focused on racial inequalities in under-resourced schools. We also address structural racism with the firm’s extensive work to support voting rights and our representation of incarcerated individuals.

For twenty years, Goodwin’s Neighborhood Business Initiative has provided pro bono legal

services to small-business owners in underserved communities, or whose businesses positively impact underserved neighborhoods. This year was among the most challenging in NBI history, as the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the rise in systemic racism and discrimination pushed many individuals, businesses and communities to their breaking point.

NBI responded to the growing need by reaching out to small businesses in low-income communities, particularly in the child care and food sectors. Dismantling systemic barriers based on race and ethnicity is one of the pillars of the NBI program, and we prioritized child care and small food businesses because while they form the backbone of our communities, they are disproportionately impacted by the inequalities inherent in our society, whether through disparities in background checks, zoning regulations or enforcement.





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*Kirkland & Ellis' HBCU team.*

## KIRKLAND & ELLIS

**K**irkland & Ellis attorneys participated in high-impact pro bono initiatives in 2020 with particular emphasis on matters related to racial justice. While much of our work has always focused on projects that help advance the needs of the black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) community, the events of 2020 have made it even more clear just how critical these efforts are and have served to strengthen our resolve to direct our resources to serve our most vulnerable populations. We have contributed to this effort in numerous ways ranging from providing legal advice to small business owners facing economic hardship, to supporting voting rights and criminal justice reform. We have not only energized the lawyers at our Firm, but have collaborated with clients and nonprofits and legal service organizations to maximize the impact of our work. For example, we managed Election Protection call centers, responding to questions

regarding primaries, the general election and the GA runoff, required by the greatest demand for election-related legal assistance in the program's history.

After 13 years of pro bono work representing historical black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Kirkland is close to solidifying a settlement that will help HBCUs. Kirkland took the case on pro bono in 2009 with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and has represented students and alumni from Maryland's four public HBCUs in its lawsuit against the state for failure to dismantle the remnants of its former segregated higher education system. The \$577 million settlement, pending approval of the parties, is one of the largest pro bono settlements in history.

[Watch Kirkland & Ellis' video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)





[Watch Christopher S. Auguste, partner, explain how Kramer Levin advances racial justice and equity here.](#)



## Kramer Levin

**I**n response to and in support of the clear and continued outcry for racial and social justice, Kramer Levin in June 2020 established the Racial Justice Initiative. This important initiative, led by the firm's Pro Bono Committee, pursues pro bono opportunities focused on racial injustice and inequality, including criminal justice reform, which has been a long-standing focus of the firm's pro bono work. The initiative concentrates its efforts in four primary areas: litigation, transactional/corporate support, voting rights, and community outreach. Kramer Levin's goal is to support actions that can affect real change.

Kramer Levin represented the TransLatin@ Coalition and the Black LGBTQIA+ Migrant Project, who serve LGBTQ Black and Latinx refugees fleeing persecution, in a suit to block the Trump administration's draconian overhaul of the asylum system that would have made

it almost impossible for LGBTQ refugees to obtain asylum. The changes, which the Trump administration rushed to publication with only 30 days for public comment and review despite spanning hundreds of pages, aimed to negatively impact almost every aspect of the asylum system. Working around the clock, Kramer Levin and co-counsel Lambda Legal and Immigration Equality, obtained an injunction blocking the rules shortly before they would have gone into effect, placing tens of thousands of LGBTQ refugees (a group disproportionately made up of non-white immigrants) at a high risk of being deported to countries where their lives would have been in danger.

Kramer Levin hosts monthly clinics to provide diverse small businesses hit hard by COVID-19 and the shutdown to restart, maintain and grow their businesses.





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**“Our victory has restored electoral voting power to a minority community that was entirely shut out and serves as a blueprint for other districts to start to address issues of race, inequality and funding.”**

**— Andrew Clubok, Partner,  
Latham & Watkins**

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## LATHAM & WATKINS<sup>LLP</sup>

**T**his year, Latham litigators achieved an important victory on behalf of the Spring Valley NAACP, Black and Latinx voters and public school students in upstate New York. Using an innovative argument applying the Voting Rights Act, our lawyers proved that minorities in a highly segregated school district were prevented from participating in political life.

The East Ramapo Central School District has a 92% Black and Latinx public school population and had historically been one of the highest-performing districts in the state. Beginning in the mid-2000s, white voters began using a “secret slating” organization to dominate at-large elections and install a majority white school board that siphoned funds from public schools to private, religiously affiliated schools.

The data-driven analysis we used to estimate racially polarized voting in the district proved essential to the case. Our experts employed a more accurate method of analyzing actual

voters, instead of just registered voters, to better understand racial voting patterns. This analysis found that Black and Latinx voters had been denied an equal opportunity to elect school board candidates in every recent election.

Following a six-week trial, a New York federal judge agreed, issuing an opinion that adopted Latham’s arguments and found for our clients. She ordered the District to create three ward-based districts in which minorities make up the majority of registered voters and would have the opportunity to elect candidates to the school board.

In February, the School District held a special election in which voters from the three newly created majority-minority wards elected representatives of their choice to the school board for the first time.

[Watch Latham & Watkins’ video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)

**“The award will help inspire further action among our lawyers, staff and friends, as we all work together to provide essential services and solutions to underserved populations doubly impacted by racial injustice and COVID-19.”**

**— Catherine Weiss, Partner and Chair Lowenstein Center for the Public Interest, Lowenstein Sandler**

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**L**owenstein Sandler has historically been committed to advancing racial equity and dismantling barriers to justice. In 2020 we continued our pre-existing racial equity work in four main areas — housing; criminal justice; immigration; and the representation of nonprofits, small businesses, and low-income entrepreneurs — with a more explicit racial justice lens.

We spearheaded a coalition of housing advocates working to prevent mass eviction in the wake of the pandemic. We successfully advocated for executive action and court reforms to prevent mass eviction and ensure tenants receive more due process in landlord-tenant court.

In 2020, New Jersey passed a bill we helped draft and champion that significantly reformed the juvenile parole and sentencing scheme. The bill's key provisions aim to reduce unjustified incarceration, modernize and improve the parole

process, and eliminate fines that can compromise a young person's future.

Our immigrant clients come to this country to escape persecution, gang violence and family abuse in Central America. Last year, we represented 49 immigrants seeking lawful status or release from detention. Our work to defend children with Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) continued in 2020 with a series of amicus briefs arguing that federal law prevents the removal of children with SIJS.

The pandemic brought disproportionately serious financial troubles to minority-owned businesses: 41 percent of Black-owned businesses were shut down by COVID-19 by the end of April compared to 17 percent of white-owned businesses. We helped more than 200 nonprofits and Black and minority-owned small businesses obtain federal funding to keep them in operation during the pandemic.





**BEACON OF JUSTICE**  
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**“We remain committed to taking even greater action to further racial equity by providing pro bono legal assistance to marginalized individuals and groups, promoting access to justice in communities of color and supporting civil rights-focused nonprofits, among many other initiatives.”**

**— Susan M. Finegan, Member and Chair of the Pro Bono Committee, Mintz**



**O**ver the past year, Mintz has doubled-down on its longstanding commitment to addressing racism and injustice in the United States, increasing diversity and inclusion at the firm and in the legal community and driving greater civic engagement at all levels. In particular, the firm has taken greater action to further racial equity by providing pro bono legal assistance to marginalized individuals and groups and by supporting civil rights-focused nonprofits.

Mintz announced a new, multi-step diversity and inclusion plan, which included a firm goal of increasing the number of Black attorneys by 50% by June 2022 and continuing to undertake social justice reform work on a pro bono basis, among several other actions. Additionally,

as part of this plan, Mintz donated \$150,000 between three nonprofits focused on civil rights.

In November 2020, Member Narges Kakalia was appointed the firm’s first Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. In the wake of the murders of George Floyd and too many other Black victims of racially-motivated murders, a group of Mintz personnel, including Ms. Kakalia, began to discuss ways in which they could drive change within their own Mintz community. Since taking on her new role, Ms. Kakalia has been vocal among law firm diversity leaders to discuss the nation’s renewed push for progress on racial and social justice, as well as strategies to create a more inclusive and equitable profession. Ms. Kakalia co-created Mintz Driving Change to help attorneys, staff, and other personnel from across the firm learn and dialog about race and racism.



*Josh Hill and litigation partner Jamie Levitt lead the MoFo team on *I.S. v. Binghamton School District*.*

# MORRISON FOERSTER

**M**orrison & Foerster and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund represent four Black and Latina girls in a lawsuit against school officials who subjected them, as middle-schoolers, to unlawful and demeaning searches in an incident that exemplifies the biases underlying the disproportionate discipline of girls of color.

The lawsuit, [I.S. v. Binghamton School District](#), arose from an incident that occurred at a middle school in Binghamton, New York. The girls, then age 12, were seen talking and laughing in the hallway during their lunch period by the school principal and assistant principal, who described them as being “hyper and giddy.” The school officials escorted the girls to the health office where — without notifying the girls’ parents — they directed the school nurse to conduct intrusive and demeaning searches of the girls, even instructing some of them to remove layers of clothing and physically touching their bodies. No evidence of wrongdoing was found.

The suit, filed in April 2019, charges that the searches resulted from racial bias. As co-counsel Cara McClellan explained in an [interview](#) with

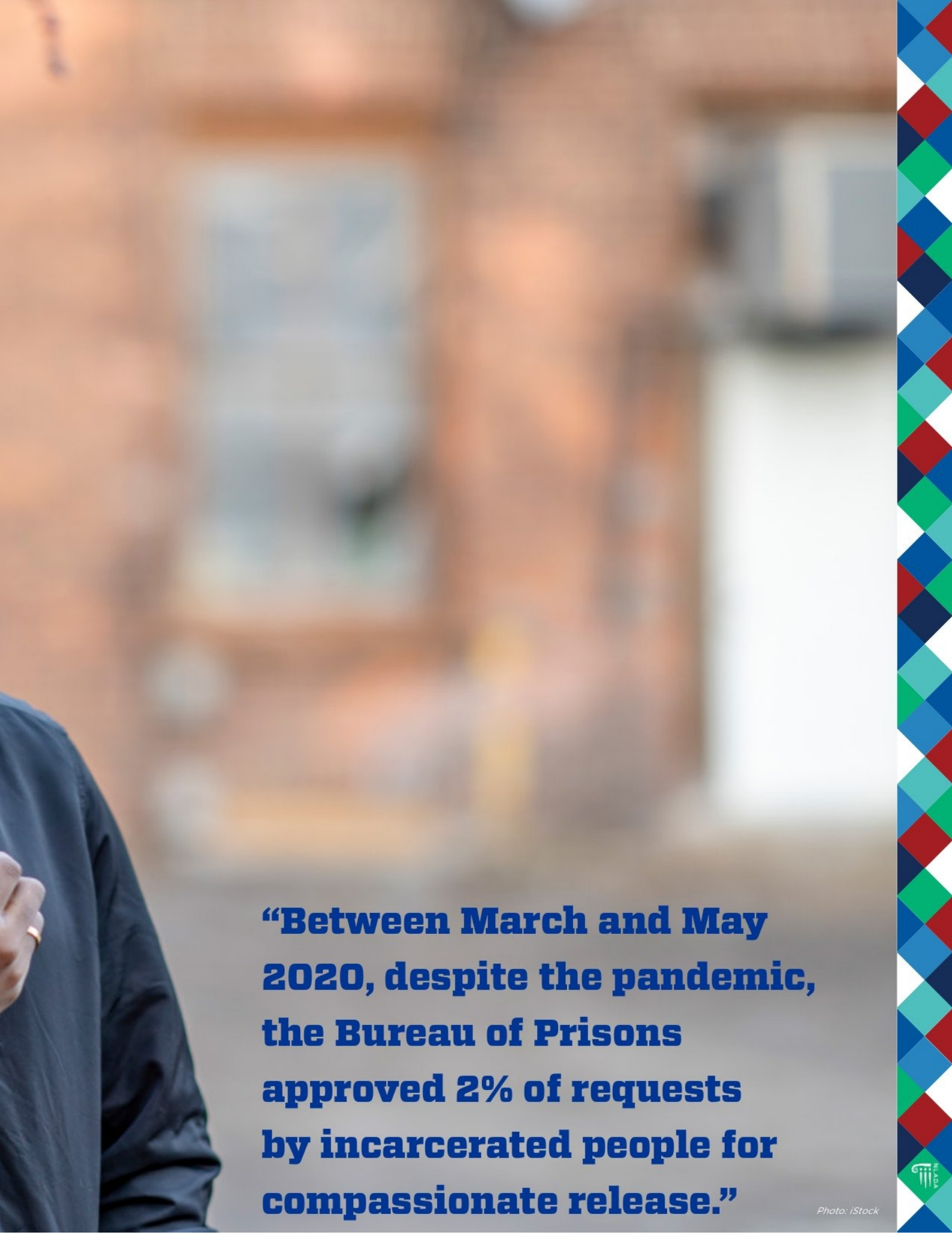
MoFo litigation partner Josh Hill, the unlawful search “embodied a lot of patterns that we’re seeing nationally in terms of how Black and Brown students are singled out for treatment as if they are engaged in suspicious or illegal behavior, simply because they are doing things that children, or teenagers, or adolescents often do.” Research cited in the complaint shows that Black girls are often viewed by educators as “more suspicious, mature, provocative and aggressive than their white peers,” and that girls “as young as five were viewed by adults as less innocent than white girls,” which creates an “adultification bias” that leads to Black girls being disproportionately disciplined in schools.

While the case is still underway, it already has drawn attention to the often-ignored issue of how Black girls are treated in schools, earning coverage by The New York Times in an article titled [A Battle for the Souls of Black Girls](#), and in an [ABC News segment](#) that aired in October 2020. Josh Hill and litigation partner Jamie Levitt lead the MoFo team on the case.

[Watch Morrison & Foerster’s video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)







**“Between March and May 2020, despite the pandemic, the Bureau of Prisons approved 2% of requests by incarcerated people for compassionate release.”**

*Photo: iStock*





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**“We are proud of what we have accomplished, but know there is more work to do. We will continue to identify and take concrete action to fight social injustice.”**

**— Brett Williamson, Firm-wide Partner in charge of pro bono and Community Legal Services Committee chair, O’Melveny & Myers**

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# O’Melveny

**A** U.S. Supreme Court victory barring vestiges of Jim Crow-era oppression. Wins that upheld fundamental voting rights. And a key briefing that helped civil-rights organizations secure the public disclosure of police misconduct records in the nation’s biggest city.

These were just a few of last year’s successes in O’Melveny’s wide-ranging campaign to tackle systemic racism.

In April, O’Melveny and Stanford Law School’s Supreme Court Litigation Clinic won a milestone victory in *Ramos v. Louisiana*, persuading the U.S. Supreme Court that the Constitution requires an unanimous jury verdict for a criminal conviction. The decision overturned a long-standing, racially unjust precedent that allowed states to convict with the assent of only 10 of 12 jurors—a practice designed to silence the voices of minority Black jurors.

O’Melveny’s win in *Holguin-Hernandez v. United States* made it easier for federal criminal

defendants to challenge the length of their sentences on appeal. The decision particularly affects people of color because they are more far likely to be policed, prosecuted, and subject to lengthy sentences than their white counterparts.

Ahead of the 2020 presidential election, O’Melveny lawyers fought voting restrictions that would have disproportionately affected voters of color. Working with civil rights groups, the firm drew attention to voter suppression in Alabama and Wisconsin.

In New York, O’Melveny filed amicus briefs opposing police unions’ attempts to delay the release of police misconduct records. And our lawyers have also helped numerous New Yorkers prepare to sue over their mistreatment by police during Black Lives Matter protests.

[Watch O’Melveny’s video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)





*Sheppard Mullin attorneys Jonathan Aronie, Dan Brown, David Douglass, Matthew Halgren and Tenaya Rodewald have contributed to the firm's racial justice and equity efforts.*



## SheppardMullin

**I**n the wake of the racial justice movement sparked by the killing of George Floyd, Sheppard Mullin's pro bono work intentionally and positively addressed racial disparities in the context of policing by creating a nationwide training program to promote safe policing; successfully litigating for disclosure of police misconduct; and publishing a police transparency guide, all of which will continue to have a positive impact on communities affected by racial disparity.

The images of three police officers standing by while Mr. Floyd died tragically exemplify what it means to be a passive bystander and, it was in this context that Sheppard Mullin attorneys embraced a unique opportunity to build a culture of active bystanders within law enforcement. In June Sheppard Mullin and Georgetown Law School's Innovative Policing Program launched the Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement

(ABLE) project with the help of Sheppard Mullin's \$100,000 donation. The ABLE program builds off of the work of Sheppard Mullin partner Jonathan Aronie as the federal court monitor over the New Orleans Police Department. As part of that monitorship, Sheppard Mullin worked pro bono to create the Ethical Policing is Courageous (EPIC) program, the nation's first department-wide peer intervention program. Following the death of Mr. Floyd, Jonathan was deluged by calls from police chiefs around the country who wanted to bring a program similar to EPIC to agencies. ABLE, which offers free active bystandership training to law enforcement agencies across the country, aims to be a part of a community's efforts to eliminate police misconduct caused by the biases that are woven into the fabric of American society.

[Watch Sheppard Mullin's video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)





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**“This year, we have increased our pro bono work and financial support of efforts to achieve racial equity in the law. We reaffirm our commitment to fight racism and advance equality in individual and systematic ways.”**

**— Harmony L. Jones, Deputy Pro Bono Counsel, Steptoe & Johnson**

**Steptoe**



**SERVES**  
PRO BONO

**I**n 2020, Steptoe increased our commitment to pro bono work that advances racial justice. We are committed work that challenges systematic racism and the negative effects it has on individuals in their everyday lives.

Steptoe recently filed a civil rights lawsuit concerning the rights of Spanish-speaking residents. While trying to assist a car accident victim our client was seized and assaulted by police officers based solely on his ethnicity and inability to seek English. The lawsuit seeks to vindicate his rights, and to require the New Carrollton Police Department to provide interpretation services to residents whose primary language is not English.

Steptoe joined ACLU of Louisiana's Litigation Campaign Against Racist Policing to challenge racially discriminatory policing practices. The initiative seeks to bring cases challenging racially motivated stops and seizures.

Steptoe conducted research to support the litigation campaign, and intends to take a case concerning racially discriminatory policing.

Steptoe partnered with the Promise of Justice Institute in the Jim Crow Juries Project, which seeks to heal the pain inflicted by Louisiana's racist Jim Crow system that silenced many black jurors. Steptoe represents three clients seeking relief after the Supreme Court's decision in *Ramos v. Louisiana*.

We are committed to representing clients in the criminal justice system who have experienced the effects of the systematic racism. Steptoe and local counsel won the release of Roderick Johnson. Mr. Johnson served 23 years on death row in a case involving egregious prosecutorial misconduct. The Court granted our double jeopardy motion holding the prosecutors intentionally withheld Brady evidence during the client's homicide trial, depriving him of his right to a fair trial.



Watch Stinson partner Traci Bransford speak on behalf of Darnella Frazier [here](#).

# STINSON

**W**hile millions across the globe felt the impact of George Floyd’s death, Stinson’s Minneapolis Deinaid Legal Clinic pro bono clients, most of whom are registered patients of the Community University Health Care Center located a few miles from where Mr. Floyd died, felt the impact of this tragedy and the following social unrest in a direct and personal way. Immediately following this tragedy, the need for basic services — food, water and medication — skyrocketed. Stinson volunteers worked to meet these basic needs, while continuing to use their legal skills on antiracism activities across the firm.

Stinson partner, [Traci Bransford](#) acted as pro bono general counsel for Ms. Darnella Frazier and family handling crisis intervention concerning this young woman’s participation in the George Floyd murder trial, communications with media and others and advised the family on the financial, intellectual property and various ramifications of community donations and recognition.

In July 2020, Stinson attorneys joined with the ACLU of Missouri in a lawsuit challenging the

constitutionality of city protest ordinances for over-breadth and/or being void for vagueness. During peaceful protests, the ordinances were used to cite individuals for “failure to obey” a police order. One ordinance specifically relates to being in the street, but the ACLU had received reports of indiscriminate application. The lawsuit sought to clarify the speech and due process rights of peaceful protestors.

In fall 2020, Stinson joined a group of law firms and corporate legal departments committed to addressing the collateral consequences of criminal justice system involvement, and the disproportionate impact it has on communities of color. The project’s short term goal is for all Minnesotans with criminal records eligible for expungement to have access to legal help to expunge those records. In the longer term, our goal is to support systemic change that will reduce the collateral consequences of criminal justice system involvement.

[Watch Stinson’s video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)





**BEACON OF JUSTICE**  
2021 Awardees

**“WilmerHale is very proud of the longstanding commitment of our attorneys and staff to the cause of racial justice and equity. We are honored to be striving in such good company.”**

**— Mark Fleming, Partner and Co-chair of the Racial Justice and Reform Initiative, WilmerHale**

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WILMER CUTLER PICKERING HALE AND DORR LLP ®

**W**ilmerHale’s response to continued racial injustice further highlighted by the events of 2020 flowed naturally from the firm’s long and proud history of dedication to racial justice and pro bono legal services. Sharing in the international outrage following George Floyd’s murder, WilmerHale created the Racial Justice Reform Initiative in June 2020. Its mandate: to identify areas where our lawyers and firm can further racial justice and marshal our resources to have the greatest impact.

WilmerHale and co-counsel won a momentous California Supreme Court victory for pre-trial arrestees financially unable to post cash bail. The case centered on Kenneth Humphrey, a Black man arrested for allegedly robbing an elderly fellow resident of a senior home of \$7 and a cologne bottle. Mr. Humphrey’s cash bail requirement was initially set at \$600,000, and then at \$350,000, but he was denied pretrial release because he

did could not post either amount. In a unanimous decision, the California high court ruled that “the common practice of conditioning freedom solely on whether an arrestee can afford bail is unconstitutional.” Because of cash bail’s disparate negative impact on communities of color and the poor, the decision was an important victory for racial justice.

With the nation’s attention refocused in 2020 on the importance of police reform, WilmerHale lawyers advised the U.S. Conference of Mayors’ Police Reform and Racial Justice Working Group on its August 2020 report, which provided guidance to the nation’s cities on improving police accountability, among other changes meant to end the injustices long experienced by Black Americans during police encounters.

[Watch WilmerHale’s video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)

**“We look forward to continuing to expand our efforts and creativity in pursuit of justice for those in need.”**

**— Luke Liss, Senior Counsel and Pro Bono Counsel, Wilson Sonsini**

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# WILSON SONSINI

**S**ince now-retired partner Harry Bremond — one of the first African American attorneys in the Bay Area — founded the firm’s pro bono program, Wilson Sonsini has advocated for racial justice. Recently the firm was counsel in a Kern High School District litigation matter in partnership with California Rural Legal Assistance and the Equal Justice Society. After a three-year court battle to stop discriminatory discipline practices that disproportionately deprived African American and Latino students of their right to an education, a landmark settlement was reached with KHSD that included an immediate change to the district’s discipline practices to reduce the disproportionate suspensions, expulsions and involuntary school transfers of African American and Latino students.

The firm was also pro bono counsel along with the ACLU of Northern California and the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area in a case filed against

various government entities on behalf of adult immigration detainees who had been unnecessarily and painfully shackled at the waist, wrists and ankles in every hearing before the immigration court, regardless of individual circumstances. In addition, the firm represented Asian Americans Advancing Justice — Asian Law Caucus, Asian Americans Advancing Justice — Los Angeles, and the ACLU of Northern California in *Asian Americans Advancing Justice v. Alex Padilla*, a suit that successfully obtained increased access to language-translation assistance for various groups of Asian American voters.

Throughout 2020, Wilson Sonsini increased its already significant efforts to address racial disparities, pledging to increase pro bono services focused on racial justice by \$15 million over the next three years.

[Watch Wilson Sonsini’s video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)





**BEACON OF JUSTICE**  
2021 Awardees

**“By showcasing this work and providing a forum to discuss the myriad issues in the fight, we are able to engage more allies and advocates in using the law to pursue racial equity.”**

**— Steve Herman, Partner and Pro Bono Program Co-Chair, Zuckerman Spaeder**

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**ZUCKERMAN  
SPAEDER**

**T**hrough pro bono representations during 2020 Zuckerman Spaeder LLP combated racism in criminal justice, housing and immigration legal systems. The federal prison population is about 40 percent Black and 30 percent Hispanic. Black and Hispanic people are more likely than white people to have diabetes, high blood pressure and other co-morbidities related to COVID-19. Between March and May 2020, despite the pandemic, the Bureau of Prisons approved 2% of requests by incarcerated people for compassionate release.

ZS represented 13 indigent incarcerated individuals, 10 of whom were Black or Hispanic, in moving their sentencing courts to reduce their sentences given an “extraordinary and compelling reason.” By February, the firm won early release for a client based on compassion. By April, ZS had established a favorable precedent that exhaustion

of administrative remedies is not required for a court to order compassionate release of an incarcerated person where risk of COVID-19 accentuates non-COVID-19 factors. By June, ZS obtained a 23-page judicial opinion declaring that the heightened risk of contracting COVID-19 in prison was an independent reason to grant compassionate release.

ZS secured court-ordered release even though only 1/9 of the sentence had been served. A court ordered early release of a client within 48 hours of motion filing where the government had stated its intention to oppose. Another court ordered a client released from prison within four days of the firm taking his representation; this result reportedly is the fastest compassionate release on record.

[Watch Zuckerman Spaeder's video describing how they advance racial justice & equity here.](#)

# Congratulations to all the 2021 Beacon of Justice Awardees

**Akin Gump**  
STRAUSS HAUER & FELD LLP

 **Arent Fox**

**Baker  
McKenzie.**

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**Look for the next  
Beacon of Justice Awards  
call for applications in January 2022!**