

Sheppard Mullin Announces 2020 Pro Bono Award Recipients

Firm Recognizes Three Associates and One Staff Member Who Demonstrated Significant Commitment to Pro Bono This Year

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Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP is pleased to announce that associates Melissa Mikail, Hannah Wigger and Imad Matini, and secretary Norma Mondonedo are the recipients of the 2020 Bob Gerber Pro Bono Award, which honors and recognizes Sheppard Mullin attorneys and staff who demonstrate a significant commitment to pro bono.

Mikail is an active member of the firm's Pro Bono Committee and one of the coordinators of the firm's pro bono adoption program who oversees dozens of Sheppard Mullin attorneys on their cases. This year, Mikail concluded her first pro bono case that began in 2018 for a client who fled from her family following her high school graduation to avoid an agreement to sell her as a virgin to a wealthy family in her home country. Mikail helped this client file a name change petition under seal and then obtain a new Social Security number after three rejections, allowing her client to finally start a new life. Also this year, Mikail completed her third adoption, handled two asylum cases, and filed an emergency motion to help a client who was forced into homelessness at the start of the pandemic. She is currently working on a financial elder abuse case and a criminal defense case. Mikail earned her B.A., *summa cum laude*, from the University of California, Riverside, and her J.D. from Harvard Law School. She is an associate in the Business Trial practice group and resides in the firm's Century City, California office.

Wigger devoted hundreds of hours to client Oceana in three cases under the Endangered Species Act, challenging agency action affecting the survival and death rates of loggerhead sea turtles, including drafting and arguing a successful motion for summary judgment in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. Wigger also handled two asylum cases, assisted clients with asylum applications, hearing preparation, employment authorizations, COVID-related issues, and provided comments regarding the government's new proposed asylum regulations. Wigger earned her B.A. and J.D. from Vanderbilt University. She is currently an associate in the firm's Business Trial practice group and resides in the firm's Washington, D.C. office.

Matini is an active member of the firm's Pro Bono Committee. This year, he managed all major phases of three Endangered Species Act cases in D.C. federal court on behalf of Oceana, the world's largest ocean conservation advocacy group, and obtained multiple favorable rulings. Matini also was instrumental in a successful immigration matter that resulted in reuniting a father and son after 15 years apart. In addition, Matini served as the firm's liaison with the Office of Tenant Advocate in Washington, D.C. In his role as liaison, he litigated two cases on behalf of tenants in need of legal help during the pandemic, successfully arguing, briefing, and obtaining a temporary restraining order to halt an eviction, as well as successfully negotiating a favorable settlement for a client in a discrimination matter. Matini earned his B.A. from the College of William and Mary,

and his M.B.A. and J.D., *Order of the Coif*, from West Virginia University. He is an associate in the firm's Business Trial practice group and resides in the Washington, D.C. office.

"Melissa, Hannah and Imad represent the best of our profession. The multiple and varied pro bono projects that they took on in 2020 on top of their heavy client workloads, and experience that they gained, is something to be admired and emulated by all attorneys," said Dan Brown, the firm's Pro Bono Partner.

Commenting on receiving the Bob Gerber Pro Bono Award, Wigger said, "I am deeply honored by this award and humbled to be a part of Sheppard Mullin's vast pro bono network. My work with Oceana and my immigration clients is incredibly meaningful to me, and I am grateful for the firm's support in pursuing these passions."

Matini said, "I am humbled and thankful for being recognized for this award. As attorneys, we have an obligation to provide pro bono services to ensure our courts and legal process remain accessible and fair to the underrepresented in our society. To that end, Sheppard Mullin does an outstanding job of providing attorneys with ample pro bono opportunities and encouraging each of us to help those in need and give back to our communities."

Mikail stated, "Since entering law school, I have viewed the practice of law as a privilege that confers a moral duty to ensure that justice exists for all. My pro bono cases have enriched my practice and my life in unseen ways that have impacted the way I carry out my work. When you assist underprivileged clients and help them successfully navigate a complex legal system, you can see your impact immediately. It is truly a blessing to serve as the access point to the justice system for others and to be able to provide life changing support."

Mondonedo is the first staff member to receive the Bob Gerber Award, and is being recognized for her years-long devotion to the firm's pro bono asylum and immigration cases as an interpreter and client liaison.

Brown said, "Norma's contributions to our asylum and immigration cases cannot be overstated. I can't recall a period of time over the years when Norma was not assisting on one or more cases. She is a valuable member of our team, and it is because of her that we have been able to make a difference in the lives of so many clients."

Sheppard Mullin's Bob Gerber Pro Bono Award is the firm's highest pro bono honor, recognizing and rewarding the important pro bono work done by Sheppard Mullin attorneys and staff. The award is named in honor and memory of Bob Gerber, the founder of Sheppard Mullin's pro bono program and its leader for more than a decade.

Attorneys

Imad S. Matini

Hannah J. Wigger

Practice Areas

Litigation