

# Justice Matters

Simpson Thacher  
*Pro Bono* Newsletter



December 2025

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# Little Bits of Good

“Do your little bit of good where you are, it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

– *Desmond Tutu*

In keeping with our Pro Bono Recognition theme for 2025, this section of our newsletter will focus on the “little bits of good” our pro bono volunteers have contributed in recent months.

Associate

**Marco Linares**

**Cordero** (NY) obtained a guardianship order from Queens Family Court for a Guinean client who is currently attending college to pursue his dream of becoming an electrical engineer. This order will enable our client to apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status to remain in the United States lawfully.

Associates

**Ben Bogard** (NY),

**Spencer Goodson** (NY) and

**Emily Rosenthal** (NY) supervised by Partner **Leanne Welds** (NY) negotiated and finalized a lease for a nonprofit organization that offers year-round academic assistance and family support to New York City public school students.

Associates

**Ariana**

**Benhuri** (NY) and

**Elie Lipnik** (NY)

procured a long-awaited green card for a victim of human trafficking.

Associate **Tiffani Banks**

(NY) secured almost \$3,000 in one-shot rental assistance from the City of New York for a woman who had fallen behind on her rent while caring for her sick mother. The one-shot grant cleared past rental arrears, protecting the woman and her mother from eviction proceedings.

Associates

**Melissa Bueno** (NY)

and **Francisca Johanek** (NY) obtained guardianship and special findings orders from New York Family Court for a Guatemalan client. These findings paved the way for the client to win Special Immigrant Juvenile Status from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service.

Associates

**Sophie Gandler** (NY) and

**Jack Nalen** (NY) presented a pro bono workshop for budding entrepreneurs on the legal essentials of starting a business, including the pros/cons of various business structures, the formation process and governance best practices.

Associate

**Abby Janik** (NY)

renewed our client’s employment authorization, which will enable the client to continue legally working in the United States while she waits for her green card.

Associate

**Laura Ribero**

(NY) partnered with Access Justice Brooklyn to present the basics of financial literacy to a group of first-generation young women at the YWCA Brooklyn.



The following attorneys were featured as part of our monthly Pro Bono Spotlight series in the second half of 2025.

# Quarterly Spotlights: Meet Our Attorneys

## *November Spotlight*

**Sophie Gandler**, a New York Funds Associate, talks about the countless entrepreneurs whose companies she learned about in detail as she advised them on corporate structure, governance, and contract issues at the Firm's pro bono small business clinic.



## *October Spotlight*

**Jake Madden**, a New York Healthcare and Life Sciences Associate, discusses his pro bono work supervising teams that drafted critical resources on the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act and a 50-state compendium of instructions on obtaining key voter identification documents, among other pro bono projects.



## *September Spotlight*

**Amy Dawson**, a New York Litigation Associate, recounts her pro bono work representing low-income immigrants, refugees, survivors of human trafficking and tenants.



## *August Spotlight*

**Margerite Blase**, a New York Litigation Associate, describes her pro bono work supervising limited review case evaluations for the Innocence Project.



## *July Spotlight*

**Jesse Feng**, a Palo Alto Capital Markets Associate, discusses his work supervising pro bono work on behalf of veterans, including medical file reviews and discharge upgrade applications, as well as his efforts to build the Firm's pro bono work on behalf of California small businesses.



## Federal District Court Rules That the Map for Electing Mississippi Supreme Court Justices Violates the Voting Rights Act

Simpson Thacher, alongside the ACLU, the ACLU of Mississippi and the Southern Poverty Law Center, won a landmark case challenging the map for electing Justices to the Mississippi Supreme Court. Of the 125 Justices who have served on the Mississippi Supreme Court in the state's entire history, only four have been Black. Each of the Black Justices was first appointed by the then-sitting Governor before going on to win an election.

The case proceeded to an eight-day trial in August of 2024. A year later, on August 19, 2025, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi [ruled](#) that the electoral map violates Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and must be redrawn. The court found it "critical" that no Black candidate had ever won a seat on the Mississippi Supreme Court without "possessing the incumbency advantage" of a prior gubernatorial appointment. Based on the extensive expert and documentary evidence presented by the plaintiffs, the court determined that "Black candidates who desire to run for the Mississippi Supreme Court face a grim likelihood of success."

The court enjoined defendants from utilizing the current electoral map in any further Mississippi Supreme Court elections and provided the Mississippi Legislature with the opportunity in the first instance to enact a new electoral map. The defendants have appealed the court's decision.

The Simpson Thacher team includes Partner [Jonathan Youngwood](#) (NY), Senior Counsel [Janet Gochman](#) (NY), and Associates [Noah Gimbel](#) (D.C.) and [Kate Lambroza](#) (D.C.). Former Counsel [Isaac Rethy](#) also played a critical role on the case.

## Successful Record Clearing Motion for a Youthful Conviction Gives a New Life to a Mother in Washington, D.C.

On July 16, 2025, the D.C. Superior Court granted a motion written by Associate [Samantha Sergent](#) (D.C.) to set aside the youthful convictions of our client, who as a child experienced abuse from her parent and was diagnosed with several mental health conditions as a teenager. At age nineteen, our client pled guilty to charges of simple assault and destruction of property worth less than \$200. The following year, she was convicted of simple assault.

Our client is now the mother of two teenage daughters, has had steady employment for over a year, gives back to her community through volunteering at an organization that works to fight homelessness and hunger, and serves as a mentor to a teenage girl through the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. Because of her past convictions, however, our client has had trouble finding employment and could not qualify for a vocational training program to become a surgical technician. She has also been denied Section 8 housing twice because of her record and she has been unable to serve as a chaperone for her daughter's school field trips. Having her conviction set aside will allow our client to fully live her life without barriers.





## London Team Supports Climate Conscious Small Business

Simpson Thacher recently represented [The Ferm](#), a London climate conscious start-up that makes kimchi out of food waste, striving for zero waste in the U.K. food system. The founder needed advice to bring an angel investor in as a co-founder and to scale for a potential Series A fundraise but could not afford legal advice. London Partner **Matt Feehily** and Associates **Lauren Gluzman** and **Ernest Ip** drafted a Co-Founders Agreement and Shareholders Agreement, enabling The Ferm to take the next step in growing the planet-positive small business.



## Federal District Courts Issue Preliminary Injunctions Prohibiting the Mandatory Placement of the Ten Commandments in Arkansas and Texas Public Schools

Simpson Thacher, together with the ACLU, the ACLU of Arkansas, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Freedom From Religion Foundation, won preliminary injunctions prohibiting the enforcement of Arkansas and Texas laws requiring that a copy of the Ten Commandments be posted in every public school classroom. The plaintiffs contended that these laws would pressure students into religious observance, among other concerns.

On August 4, 2025, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas [held](#) that the Arkansas statute is “plainly unconstitutional” and “incompatible with the Founding Fathers’ conception of religious liberty.” Two weeks later, on August 20, 2025, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas

[determined](#) that the Texas law “crosses the line from [religious] exposure to coercion.” The court found that the law “impermissibly takes sides on theological questions,” and concluded that “the displays are likely to pressure the child-Plaintiffs into religious observance, meditation on, veneration, and adoption of the State’s favored religious scripture, and into suppressing expression of their own religious or nonreligious backgrounds and beliefs while at school.” The defendants have appealed the decisions.

The Simpson Thacher team includes Partner **Jonathan Youngwood** (NY), Senior Counsel **Janet Gochman** (NY), and Associates **Kristen Crow** (NY), **Noah Gimbel** (D.C.), **Avia Gridi** (D.C.), **Noah Huffman** (NY), **Jordan Krieger** (D.C.), and **Victoria Wang** (NY).



## London Attorneys Submit a Report on Access to Counsel for Children in the British Social Care System

London Partner **James Watson**, Associates **Euan Gillies** and **Chloe Potter**, and Paralegal **Jessie Li** drafted a report addressing access to counsel for children in the social care system on behalf of Central England Law Centre (CELC). Through its immigration and asylum casework and its hosting of Kids in Need of Defense U.K., CELC personnel have seen many cases in which children in the social care system don't receive timely legal advice on their immigration status, which has impacted their ability to obtain leave to remain in the United Kingdom, citizenship and related rights and entitlements.

The report highlighted the challenges that children in the social care system face with respect to securing their Article 6 ECHR rights to legal advice. The report was submitted to the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee's Inquiry into Human Rights of Children in the Social Care System. The submission has provided the Parliamentary Committee with the evidence it needs to press for law reform to address inequities and elevate the legal advice rights of children in care.

## New York Litigation Team Represents a Criminal Defendant in a Four-Day Trial in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York

In July 2025, Partner **Martin Bell** and Associates **Melissa Bueno** and **Lindsay Rule** represented a criminal defendant referred by the Criminal Justice Act pro bono panel in a four-day jury trial before Judge Denise Cote in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. At issue were charges in connection with gun and drug-related conspiracies. Melissa and Lindsay each cross-examined two witnesses, earning invaluable trial experience.

The jury found the client guilty of several federal crimes because there was significant evidence pointing toward the defendant's guilt. However, the Simpson Thacher team convinced the jury to vote "no" on an important weight question for the drug count, thereby defeating a mandatory minimum sentence of five years on that count. The team also managed to contextualize the Government's evidence to make it clear (for sentencing purposes) that our client did not mastermind the gun or drug conspiracies, and that his role was limited to execution rather than strategy. Judge Cote praised the Simpson Thacher team for their zealous advocacy on the client's behalf.





## Louisiana Parole Board Grants Early Release to a Defendant Who Served Two Decades in Prison for an Armed Robbery

On November 4, 2025, the Louisiana Parole Board unanimously voted in favor of granting parole to a 58-year-old man who had served over 20 years of a 30-year sentence for an armed robbery he committed while high on cocaine. During his time in prison, our client demonstrated extraordinary rehabilitation through his pursuit of religious studies and alcohol and substance abuse treatment. He has not had a single disciplinary incident in the past fifteen years. He looks forward to spending time in person with his beloved children and grandchildren, attending the church that he went to as a young child, and earning a lawful living upon his release.

Associate **Nathan Gonzalez** (D.C.) spoke on our client's behalf at his parole hearing. The Simpson Thacher team also included Partner **Marcy Geller** (NY), Associate **Humza Yousuf** (NY) and Pro Bono Attorney **Nihara Choudhri**.



## D.C. Superior Court Issues Orders Sealing Arrest Records for a Court Employee

This past fall, the D.C. Superior Court granted motions to seal the arrest records for a janitorial employee of the D.C. Courts who has had two interactions with the criminal justice system. In 2016, he was arrested for possessing an unregistered gun that in fact belonged to an acquaintance. In 2019, he was arrested for driving while under the influence of alcohol. Our client successfully completed a diversion program pursuant to which he was required to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He has had no further arrests since then, and he is now extremely careful never to drink to excess or get behind the wheel after consuming alcohol.

Although our client has no criminal convictions, his arrest records have posed an obstacle to his continued employment at the D.C. Courts because of a new bi-annual background check requirement. He was very afraid that he would lose his job and be unable to pay his mortgage or support his two children. Our client is very relieved that the court has ordered the sealing of his arrest records.

The Simpson Thacher team includes Partner **Sara Razi** (D.C.), and Associates **Leila Khamees** (LA) and **Shinae Yoon** (D.C.).



## Multi-Office Team Creates a 50-State Guide for Obtaining Voter Identification Documents

For states that require voter identification to vote, the process of obtaining the necessary identification documents can pose a significant hurdle to participating in the political process. And even in states that don't require voter identification, individuals must typically have identifying documents in order to register to vote. Procuring these documents can be an administrative challenge both for the individuals themselves and the nonprofit organizations that advise them.

Organizing a large team of summer associates, Associate **Jake Madden** (NY) led the effort to create a massive 50-state guide for obtaining passports, birth certificates and other primary identification documents. This guide has already been distributed to multiple national civil rights organizations and will be integrated into the Election Protection program of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Counsel **Adrienne Baxley** (NY) and Associates **Kayshana Mohanaraj** (NY), **Rebecca Rose** (LA), **Kiley Short** (NY) and **Kelsey Vickery** (NY), worked with Jake to supervise the volunteers for this project. Other volunteers included Partner **Kathryn Stone** (D.C.); Counsel **Carol Chan** (HK); and Associates **Chandler Cohen** (PA), **Will Foy** (LA), **Zach Guttman** (NY) and **Leila Khamees** (LA).



## The Firm Continues Its Program Assisting Legal Services Organizations Throughout the Country by Writing Country Conditions Reports to Support Asylum Seekers

As part of the Firm's ongoing work for legal services organizations that represent immigrants seeking asylum in the United States, the following lawyers recently prepared materials in support of asylum applications: Counsel **Adam Lovell** (LA) and Associate **Darya Kaboli-Nejad** (NY) (country conditions report for Legal Services NYC focused on the Garifuna community in Honduras); Associates **Feven Yohannes** (D.C.) (country conditions report for a Legal Services NYC client fleeing gangs and domestic violence in the Honduras); **Jessica Hwang** (LA) (country conditions report for a Brooklyn Defender Services client fleeing religious persecution); **Emily Rosenthal** (NY) (country conditions report for a Tahirih Justice Center client fleeing gender-based violence in Chad); **Sawyer Nash** (NY) and **Feven Yohannes** (D.C.) (legal brief and country conditions report for a Tahirih Justice Center client fleeing female genital mutilation in Senegal); and **Hala Bazzaz** (NY) (country conditions report for a Brooklyn Defender Services client from a conservative Muslim family fleeing persecution for being gay in Senegal).



## Team Secures Asylum for a Gay Man After an Almost-10 Year Wait

Since 2016, Simpson Thacher has represented a client seeking asylum in the United States based on his fear of persecution in his home country of El Salvador, where he suffered beatings, taunts and arrests on account of his identity as a gay man. Though our attorneys filed his asylum application soon after meeting him, our client was stuck in an asylum backlog for many years waiting for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to schedule an asylum interview. Our client was finally granted asylum in August of 2025. He expressed tremendous gratitude that the Firm had continued advocating for him for so many years. The volunteers who helped our client get his asylum application over the finish line were Associate **Sawyer Nash** (NY) with an assist from **Amy Dawson** (NY) and Paralegal **Danny Castillo** (NY).

## Simpson Thacher Legal Working Group Secures Dismissal of Removal Proceedings Against Six Children With Approved SIJS Petitions

Earlier this year, the Firm accepted referrals of six immigrant children whose Special Immigrant Juvenile Status petitions had been granted by U.S.C.I.S., but their removal cases were still pending in Immigration Court. Because loss of federal funding left these children without attorneys while their removal cases were still open, Simpson Thacher teams filed a Motion to Dismiss for each child. All six motions were recently granted. The working group of Simpson Thacher attorneys included Counsel **Beate Krieger** (NY) and **Debra Sutter** (D.C.), and Associates **Devon Berman** (NY), **Franklin Castro** (LA), **Anna Coplon** (PA), **Shuhao Fan** (NY), **Raelissa Glennon-Zukoff** (LO), **Leila Khamees** (LA), and **Britta Vlastelicia** (PA).



# Clinic Roundup

## “They Fought for Us, Now We Fight for Them”: Simpson Thacher Launches Two Virtual Clinics Serving Veterans

This Fall, the Firm launched two new clinics with The Veterans Consortium (“TVC”), a national nonprofit pro bono program whose motto is “They Fought for Us. Now We Fight for Them.” TVC trains and mentors attorneys to help veterans get the benefits they earned through a series of limited scope clinics.

- **Supporting Service Members Who Experienced Military Sexual Trauma**

In September, Simpson Thacher teams worked with women veterans who experienced Military Sexual Trauma (“MST”), which refers to sexual assault or threatening sexual harassment experienced during military service. It is estimated that 1 in 3 women veterans have MST exposure and are in need of assistance in filing claims with the Veterans’ Administration for disability compensation, which can help them to avoid poverty, homelessness, and disparities in health care access. At the clinic, teams met with female veterans to prepare a personal statement and the necessary forms to support an application for MST-based claims. The Simpson Thacher volunteers included Partners Carleigh Rodriguez (D.C.) and Jaclyn Starr (NY); Associates **Laurel Fresquez** (D.C.), **Audra Gibbs** (LA), **Adriana Hong** (NY), **Darya Kaboli-Nejad** (NY), **Leila Khamees** (LA), **Erin Magoffie** (D.C.) and **Samantha Sergent** (D.C.); and Staff Attorney **Jennifer Hafkin** (NY).

- **Preparing Citizenship Applications for Those Who Served**

In October, Simpson Thacher volunteers worked with military veterans who hold green cards to complete the government application to become naturalized citizens under a special program for veterans with an Honorable Discharge or General Under Honorable Conditions Discharge. At the clinic, teams assisted in the preparation of the required forms and drafted personal narratives to support the applications. The Simpson Thacher volunteers included Partner **Toby Chun** (D.C.); Associates **Luis Aguilera** (NY), **Sean Boyle** (D.C.), **Kunzhao Cao** (NY), **Laurel Fresquez** (D.C.), **Pauline Patat** (NY) and **George Rhein** (NY); and Paralegals **Raquel Gaba** (NY), **Laura Gessman** (NY), **Graham Johnson** (NY), and **Malia Klein** (NY).

Participating volunteers reported that working with veterans and learning about their experiences during their time in service was **very rewarding**, and that **true connections** were forged even though the clinics lasted only a few hours.





## Simpson Thacher Launches New Clinic to Help Low-Income Seniors in New York City

In collaboration with Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS), the Firm launched a new housing affordability benefits law clinic to assist low-income New York City renters to determine their eligibility and apply for rent freeze benefits under the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE). Many seniors and individuals living with disabilities are eligible for rent freezes through these exemptions but have not applied, renewed, or appealed the denial of their applications. In September, Simpson Thacher volunteers provided guidance on these exemptions and helped eligible tenants apply for relief at an in-person clinic held at Goddard Riverside West Side. New York Office volunteers included Associates **Tara Martin-Chen**, and Paralegals **Raquel Gaba**, **Laura Gessman**, and **Logan Pineda**.



Volunteers meet with DRIE applicant.

## Awards

### Simpson Thacher Receives Veterans Access to Justice Award From Veterans Legal Justice of New Hampshire

Veterans Legal Justice of New Hampshire honored Simpson Thacher with the Veterans Access to Justice Award at its November 18 Celebration event for the Firm's work in creating a remote telephone intake project for New Hampshire veterans, service members and their families. Individuals call the VLJ hotline seeking advice on a variety of civil legal service matters. Since we launched this project almost three years ago, over 230 veterans have been connected to legal assistance in New Hampshire or other states. Pro Bono Specialist **Michelle Lopez** accepted the award on behalf of the Firm.



### VOLS Names New York Associate Sophie Gandler to the 2025 Pro Bono Dean's List

Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS) named Associate **Sophie Gandler** (NY) to the 2025 Pro Bono Dean's List, which recognizes lawyers from firms and companies who serve New York City communities through VOLS' projects. Sophie was honored for her exceptional service on VOLS' Microenterprise Project.

### Washington Associates Receive Bar Association's 2025 Young Lawyers of the Year Awards

Washington Associates **Nathan Gonzalez**, **Emily Linares** and **Jack Malich** will be honored on December 6<sup>th</sup> at the Bar Association of the District of Columbia's 154<sup>th</sup> Annual Banquet & Awards Gala. They will each be recognized with the 2025 Young Lawyers of the Year Award for their work as Associate Coordinators of Legal Aid DC's Making Justice Real Campaign, which raised more than \$4.2 million for Legal Aid to expand access to justice throughout the DC community.



Abja Midha (VOLS Executive Director) presents the award to **Sophie Gandler**.



# Community Engagement

## Simpson Thacher Attorney Presents at PLI on Advising the Modern Microentrepreneur: What Lawyers Need to Know in 2025

Pro Bono Attorney **Nadine Mompremier** (NY) co-presented at the Practicing Law Institute's (PLI) legal briefing entitled *Advising the Modern Microentrepreneur: What Lawyers Need to Know in 2025*. Nadine was joined by two legal services professionals to discuss how microentrepreneurship has evolved over the last few years, the legal and structural barriers facing microentrepreneurs, and how pro bono lawyers and legal service providers can best serve microentrepreneurs by meeting them where they are. Simpson Thacher attorneys can access this CLE program through their Firm-provided PLI membership.



## Simpson Thacher Washington Office Participates in the DC Walk for Justice

Simpson Thacher participated in the DC Walk for Justice 5K, a fundraiser supporting the DC Bar Foundation, which makes civil legal aid more accessible for DC residents. The walk, which took place on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, raised over \$338,000 for civil legal aid in DC. Participants included (from left to right below): Assistants **Shoney Carswell** and **Julia Watts**; Associates **Sean Boyle**, **Thomas Lopez**, and **Claire DiMario**; Partner **Karen Porter**; Director **Katelyn Benton**; and Associates **Laurel Fresquez** and **Nicole Palmadesso**.



## Simpson Thacher Hosts Youth From Exalt in Half Day Community Engagement Program

On September 23, the Firm's New York Office hosted 16 young people, from the nonprofit Exalt, who were given an inside look at Simpson Thacher through a 425 Lexington tour, skill building workshops around crafting personal brand and resumes/LinkedIn profiles, and the opportunity to learn more about the many different roles here at Simpson Thacher through a lunch panel of Simpson Thacher professionals. Exalt supports youth ages 15-19 who've been involved in the criminal justice system to re-engage with society through job training and internship placements, among other things. We thank the professional staff volunteers from the New York office who organized and executed this event, including **Renee Cucurullo, Peter Backes, Eartha Brown, Lisa Kent, Lorna Haughton, Michaela Borneo, Amanda Zeuschner, Meghan Haynes, Paula Francis, Joseph Campbell, Santos Rivera, Leonella Bhadai**, along with our facilities, conference services, and security teams whose support helped make the program possible.

## Simpson Thacher's Finance Department Assembles Backpacks for Refugee and Migrant Children in New York

At its offsite retreat earlier this Fall, the Finance Department assembled and delivered backpacks for distribution to immigrant and refugee children served by The Safe Passage Project, a legal services organization providing free representation to New York immigrants and refugee children facing deportation. We thank the following Simpson Thacher participants: **Daniel Armato, Kimberly Breen, Kerry Flitcroft, Nisha Gaba, Matthew Garman, Flavia Guimaraes, Neil Hale, Zameer Haroun, Meghan Haynes, Suela Harasani, Simon Jones, Maria Kalogianis, Brian Lau, Alison Melaugh, Melissa Morales, Oscar A Orellana, Michele Romero, Barbara Soo Hoo, David Templeman, and Emilia Trasatti.**



*Please send news items, comments or suggestions regarding the Pro Bono Program to Harlene Katzman at [hkatzman@stblaw.com](mailto:hkatzman@stblaw.com).*

# Simpson Thacher *Worldwide*



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*\* In April 2025, Simpson Thacher announced plans to expand its Bay Area presence with an office in San Francisco.*