

Debevoise  
& Plimpton

# Pro Bono Legal Service





# Brooklyn Historical Society

Debevoise advised the Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS) in its combination with the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) and its 59-branch system across the borough of Brooklyn. The Brooklyn Historical Society's iconic collections and landmarked 1881 headquarters in Brooklyn Heights have combined with BPL to create the Center for Brooklyn History (CBH) at Brooklyn Public Library, home to the most expansive collection of Brooklyn history in the world. Brooklynites will now have expanded public access to more than 160 years of unique Brooklyn history through BPL's borough-wide reach. CBH will continue to grow its collections, public programs, educational initiatives, and physical and digital history projects.



Photo Credit: Cameron Blaylock



Photo Credit: Alix Piorun



# Debevoise's Commitment to Pro Bono Legal Service

Debevoise lawyers have been dedicated to public service since our firm was founded in 1931. Pro bono legal service is a fundamental part of who we are and is critically important to those whom we assist.

Our lawyers, summer associates and other professionals in the United States provided over 75,000 hours of free legal services in 2020. By providing direct representations and partnering with human rights, legal reform and other organizations, Debevoise helps individuals, underserved communities, nonprofit organizations and small businesses.

Says Michael Blair, Debevoise's Presiding Partner, "A strong commitment to pro bono work is a long-standing tradition at Debevoise and is deeply rooted in our firm culture. Our lawyers and staff pride themselves on providing the highest-quality legal services to all of our clients, commercial and pro bono alike. Pro bono work at Debevoise not only satisfies our ethical obligation to help those in need, but is part of what makes our lawyers strong leaders in our practices and in our communities."

Others have taken note of our deep and long-standing commitment; we are consistently ranked among the top law firms in *The American Lawyer's* annual pro bono survey. We also score well in *The American Lawyer's* "A-List," which is based in part on commitment to pro bono legal service.

Debevoise is a charter signatory to the Pro Bono Institute's Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge™, and has agreed to commit at least 5% of our annual billed time to pro bono matters. We are also a signatory to the New York City Bar Statement of Pro Bono Principles and a member of the UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono.

We work on hundreds of pro bono matters each year that range from landmark international and national disputes to representing low-income individuals in the communities in which we live and practice.

Debevoise lawyers obtain pro bono work from a variety of sources. Frequently, pro bono matters are referred to us by legal service organizations with which the firm has long-standing relationships, including The Legal Aid Society, Sanctuary for Families, Human Rights First, Immigration Equality and Start Small Think Big. Other pro bono projects come from our lawyers, who are inspired by a cause. Our lawyers make their matters count by making them their own, and our clients notice the difference.

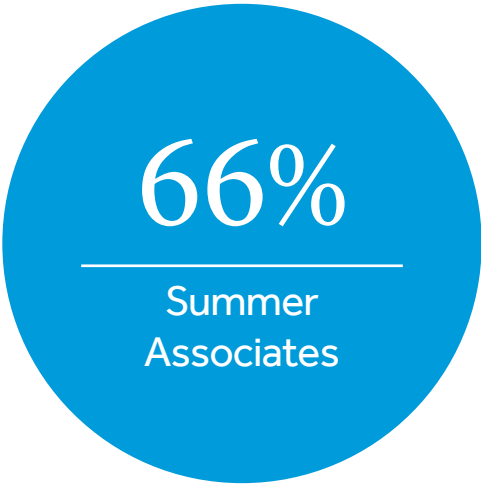
Our lawyers participate in pro bono activities throughout their careers, and we fully support our lawyers' pro bono work, regardless of whether it is within or outside of their particular practice areas. Our pro bono matters are handled like all other matters, with the dedication of all available firm resources needed for the representations.

We view pro bono work as an important element of our lawyers' professional development and work with lawyers to select pro bono matters that will help them develop legal skills and substantive knowledge.

We staff summer associates on ongoing pro bono projects and provide special opportunities for summer associates to take primary responsibility for certain matters.



In 2020, Debevoise attorneys in the United States performed over 75,000 hours of pro bono work, averaging 120.5 hours per attorney.



In 2020, 66% of Debevoise summer associates worked on pro bono matters.



In 2020, 74% of associates and 65% of all attorneys in the firm's U.S. offices performed at least 20 hours of pro bono work.



In 2020, Debevoise attorneys worked on more than 850 pro bono matters.

## Corporate Pro Bono

Our corporate lawyers provide a wide range of pro bono legal services. We assist not-for-profit organizations in entity formation, corporate governance, business operations and employee benefits matters. We also advise organizations on mergers and other strategic transactions, on real estate matters and, when necessary, on how to wind down their operations and file for bankruptcy. Our practice includes organizations based in the United States and nongovernmental organizations operating internationally.

Corporate lawyers advise low-income entrepreneurs on selecting the right corporate form for their businesses, assist in drafting governance documents and contracts, and review leases and negotiate with landlords.

When appropriate, we provide pro bono services to impact investment vehicles, benefit corporations and social enterprises, including organizations seeking to provide banking and financial services to underserved communities.

## Litigation Pro Bono

Debevoise litigators engage in a full range of pro bono activity, from representations of individuals who cannot afford legal counsel to high-impact litigation that is challenging systemic racism and changing the law and the status of low-income or marginalized communities across the country and around the globe.

We represent clients, file amici briefs, conduct research and issue reports. We work extensively in the areas of criminal justice reform, civil rights, international human rights, the death penalty, criminal defense, immigration, and employment and wage and hour violations.

## Tax Pro Bono

Lawyers in the Tax Department provide advice on a range of issues to not-for-profit organizations and to low-income entrepreneurs. We also represent low-income litigants in Tax Court.

“As a summer associate, I was asked to join a pro bono matter because someone saw on my resume that I had worked with this organization in the past. I started working with this client then, and I can still call this organization a client today.”

## Cross-Department Pro Bono

Some of our most successful pro bono efforts are not tied to a particular department and give lawyers the opportunity to work with colleagues from other practice areas. Lawyers from all departments work together on affirmative immigration matters, including DACA, asylum, legal permanent resident and naturalization applications; uncontested divorces; and name change petitions.

## Broad Partnerships

The firm has ongoing relationships with a wide variety of legal services organizations, including those listed below.

Advocates for Children  
Bail for Immigration Detainees  
Bronx Defenders  
Campaign Legal Center  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
Center for Justice and Accountability  
Center for Reproductive Rights  
Centre for Criminal Appeals  
City Bar Justice Center  
Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice  
Eyewitness to Atrocities  
Hackney Law Centre  
Her Justice  
Human Dignity Trust  
Human Rights First  
Immigration Equality  
Lambda Legal

Lawyers Alliance for New York  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
Legal Services NYC  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Pro Bono Centre  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
Office of the Appellate Defender  
PILnet  
Sanctuary for Families  
Start Small Think Big  
The Legal Aid Society  
UnLtd  
Urban Justice Center  
Veteran Advocacy Project  
Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts  
Volunteers of Legal Services





# Pro Bono Awards and Recognition

## Debevoise Receives the Partner in Justice Award from the Center for Justice and Accountability

In March 2020, the Center for Justice and Accountability presented the Partner in Justice Award to Debevoise for our work as co-counsel with CJA in groundbreaking cases seeking accountability for the Lutheran Church Massacre, one of the worst atrocities committed during Liberia's back-to-back civil wars, and for the Sri Lankan military's systematic campaign of violence against journalists during the end of its civil war.

## Honorable Jonathan Lippman New York Pro Bono Publico and Public Service Law Firm Award

Debevoise was the recipient of the 2019 Honorable Jonathan Lippman New York Pro Bono Publico and Public Service Law Firm Award for the firm's outstanding service to The Legal Aid Society and its clients. Since 2015, The Legal Aid Society has presented this annual award to the law firm with an exceptional commitment to pro bono work in furthering The Legal Aid Society's goal of "making equal justice for all not just an ideal, but truly a reality in New York." The Legal Aid Society was established more than 140 years ago and provides legal aid services in civil, criminal defense, juvenile rights and pro bono cases. Debevoise has worked closely with The Legal Aid Society for decades, taking referrals for individual clients and serving as co-counsel with The Legal Aid Society on impact litigation in areas, including prisoners' rights, immigration defense, disability advocacy, civil rights, criminal appeals, bankruptcy matters and the preservation of affordable housing.

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In 2020, we were also recognized by the following partner organizations and clients for our commitment to providing access to justice and the breadth of our pro bono practice:

- **Volunteers of Legal Services.** Debevoise partner John Kiernan was awarded the Lifetime Service Award by Volunteers of Legal Services in June 2020 for "his decades of service across nearly every area of pro bono need."
- **Manhattan Legal Services.** Debevoise and Citizens Bank were honored by Manhattan Legal Services for our many joint representations of low-income New Yorkers applying for naturalization.
- **Kids In Need Of Defense (KIND).** A Debevoise team was named by KIND as among their Pro Bono Attorneys of the Year for being "fierce advocates" in our representation of our client, her two sons and her niece who were forcibly separated at the U.S. border under the "zero-tolerance" policy. KIND said that the team was "at the forefront of providing holistic representation while lifting their client's voices and experiences."
- **GivX Report.** Debevoise's pro bono program was recognized in a GivX Report, a framework that helps analyze, benchmark and celebrate community investment, as having one of the leading community investment programs among law firms in the United Kingdom. The firm was ranked among the top three contributing law firms and our professional volunteering in particular was celebrated as one of the top five out of contributors across all sectors.
- **LawWorks Annual Pro Bono Awards.** Debevoise was recognized at the annual LawWorks Pro Bono Awards, where the firm was highly commended in the Best International Pro Bono category for our work with the Centre for Reproductive Rights and won in the Best New Pro Bono Activity category for our work with the UK charity Bail for Immigration Detainees. The awards celebrate the best legal pro bono activities undertaken by UK organizations and individuals and the positive impact they have on those helped.

To learn more about our firm and what we're passionate about follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

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## Our Offices

### New York

919 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022  
Tel: +1 212 909 6000  
Fax: +1 212 909 6836

### Luxembourg

37a Avenue John F. Kennedy  
1855 Luxembourg  
Tel: +352 27 33 54 00  
Fax: +352 26 89 25 25

### Washington, D.C.

801 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20004  
Tel: +1 202 383 8000  
Fax: +1 202 383 8118

### Moscow

OKO Tower  
21 First Krasnogvardeysky Drive, Bldg. 1  
Floor 41  
Moscow 123112  
Tel: +7 495 139 4000  
Fax: +7 495 139 4046

### London

65 Gresham Street  
London  
EC2V 7NQ  
Tel: +44 20 7786 9000  
Fax: +44 20 7588 4180

### Hong Kong

21/F AIA Central  
1 Connaught Road Central  
Hong Kong  
Tel: +852 2160 9800  
Fax: +852 2810 9828

### Paris

4 place de l'Opéra  
75002 Paris  
Tel: +33 1 40 73 12 12  
Fax : +33 1 47 20 50 82

### Shanghai

13/F, Tower 1  
Jing'an Kerry Centre  
1515 Nanjing Road West  
Shanghai 200040  
Tel: +86 21 5047 1800  
Fax: +86 21 5047 1600

### Frankfurt

Taunustor 1 (TaunusTurm)  
60310 Frankfurt am Main  
Tel: +49 69 2097 5000  
Fax: +49 69 2097 5555

### Coming Soon

Our new San Francisco office will be located at 650 California Street, in the heart of the city's Financial District.