

Pro Bono News

FALL 2024/WINTER 2025

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Pro Bono Committee

Chris Auguste **Aaron Frankel**
Co-Chairs

Jamie Porco
Director of Professional
Development and Pro Bono
Programs

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Chief Legal Talent Officer

Nada Llewellyn
Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer

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Michelle Ben-David
Dan Berman
Chloe Bootstaylor
Colin Bumby
Jessica Christy
Santo Cipolla
Boaz Cohen
Rachel Czwartacky
Ines Dominguez
Melissa Drennan
Rita D'Souza

Barry Herzog
Sabah Khokhar
Gil Liu
Danielle Moody
Laurence Pettit
Andrew Pollack
Shreya Ramchandani
Natali Rey
Jacqueline Ryu
Robert Schmidt
Norman Simon
Jonaki Singh
Jeff Trachtman

Pro Bono Events

Kramer Levin's 2nd Annual Pro Bono Fair

In October, in honor of Pro Bono Week, Kramer Levin hosted its 2nd Annual Pro Bono Fair, giving our attorneys a chance to learn more about the firm's many opportunities for involvement in pro bono projects.

Attendees were invited to explore numerous table setups for information on some of our programs, including Racial Justice, Family Court Volunteering, Small Business Clinics, Asylum & Immigration, and Her Justice.

In addition to opening remarks by Pro Bono Co-Chair **Christopher Auguste**, Professional Development and Pro Bono Director **Jamie Porco**, and Intellectual Property senior attorney **Zachary Fields**, the firm welcomed **BLOOMAGAINBKLYN** Consulting Director **Sally Demo** and **bklg.org** founder Brandon Marrow to discuss their collaboration with our attorneys. The firm also collected donations of children's pajamas and socks for pro bono client Sanctuary for Families in honor of National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.



Left: Ishani Ghosh, Natali Rey and Nick Tonckens. Middle: Pamela Badolato and Ines Dominguez at raffle table. Right: Frances Scott winning a tote bag.

Kramer Levin's 2nd Annual Pro Bono Fair During Pro Bono Week



Brandon Marrow, small business client, with Hamilton Drucker and Daniel DePasquale.



Top: Panelists. Bottom left: Hannah Sosland and Rita D'Souza. Bottom right: Raffle table.



Danielle Moody and Randy Kreider.



Rachel Czwartacky and Jonaki Singh at asylum table.



Jamie Porco and Pamela Badolato at donation table.



Natali Rey and Nick Tonckens.



Left: Sally Demo and Chris Auguste. Right: Westlaw table.



Left: Francisco Aldahondo. Right: Laszlo Herwitz.



Pro Bono Events (Cont.)

Teach For America Lunch & Learn

On Nov. 18, Executive Director of Teach For America (TFA) New York **Tia Morris**, along with other members of the leadership team, hosted a Lunch & Learn presentation where Kramer Levin employees learned more about Teach For America’s mission to find, develop and support a diverse network of leaders who expand opportunity for children from classrooms, schools, and every sector and field that shapes the broader systems in which schools operate. After 35 years of impact, TFA is now focused on a bold goal: By 2030, twice as many children in communities where TFA works will be meeting key academic milestones that indicate they are on a pathway to economic mobility and a life filled with possibility.



Left: Merritt Peck, Sarah Martin, Imani Hope, Tia Morris, Evan Raskin and Rebecca Polinsky.
Right: TFA Team.

We heard about TFA’s efforts to expose students to career opportunities and how Kramer Levin can support this mission. Bankruptcy and Restructuring associates **Evan Raskin** and **Rebecca Polinsky** are alumni of Teach For America, and they spoke about their experiences. We are looking forward to a future collaboration with TFA!

Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month

In commemoration of Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month, the Pro Bono and Diversity and Inclusion teams invited the Kramer Levin community to join “Removing Barriers for Equal Access: A Snapshot of Voting Rights Issues Confronting the Latino Electorate,” a conversation with **José Pérez**, deputy general counsel and former legal director at **LatinoJustice PRLDEF**.

Mr. Pérez discussed how English-only elections present barriers to voting for the Latino electorate, even though appropriate language materials are guaranteed by the Voting Rights Act. Additionally, he dispelled myths surrounding noncitizen voting and cited recent related cases in New York. Mr. Pérez also focused on LatinoJustice’s efforts to protect the rights of Latino voters through the use of state voting rights acts. This discussion was moderated by Litigation associate **Andrew Vazquez**.



Veterans Day Panel

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team hosted a panel in commemoration of Veterans Day, spotlighting the firm’s veterans and lawyers who work on behalf of veterans’ causes. The event, “Honoring Service: A Panel Discussion with the Firm’s Veterans and Advocates,” highlighted the firm’s pro bono work advocating for veterans, with a focus on Litigation partner **Boaz Cohen**’s efforts with the **Veterans Assistance Project**. The discussion was moderated by Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer **Nada Llewellyn**.



Clinics and Trainings

Uncontested Divorce Clinic With Access Justice Brooklyn



On Dec. 4, Kramer Levin hosted a Pro Se Uncontested Divorce Clinic with Access Justice Brooklyn.

Attorneys attended a training and assisted low-income pro se litigants through the process of obtaining a divorce. Teams drafted the initial divorce papers and will help effectuate service of process and draft the final divorce papers, providing clients with a new start on life.



Left to right: Arlene Ortiz-Leyte, Alyssa Canter and Steven Ficurilli.



Left to right: Chloe Bootstaylor, Sumaya Restagno and Katie Rubery.

Recognition

NYLAG 2024 Pro Bono Awards Honorable Mention



On Oct. 24, Kramer Levin was given an honorable mention at the 2024 Pro Bono Awards hosted by the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). The event's program noted, "Kramer Levin has been incredibly gracious in covering visa extension application fees for NYLAG clients who rely on these filings to continue crucial medical treatment in the United States. Kramer Levin issued new checks to cover the higher fee amount for five clients when the application fees unexpectedly increased during routine filing submissions. It has been truly great for NYLAG to work with Kramer Levin and have their pro support in these consequential pro bono cases."

Sean Cassidy and Brian Hilburn Named to VOLS Pro Bono Dean's List



Associates **Sean Cassidy** and **Brian Hilburn** were named to the Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS) Pro Bono Dean's List for 2024. The list recognizes hardworking and dedicated individuals who have made a tremendous impact on helping New Yorkers access justice.



Law360 Pulse 2024 Pro Bono Ranking

Kramer Levin ranked fifth in *Law360's* 2024 pro bono rankings, which compare the participation numbers for U.S. attorneys across 221 qualifying firms. The data considered how many lawyers work at least 50 pro bono hours annually, as recommended by the American Bar Association. In 2024, 82.6% of our attorneys participated in pro bono activity, and nearly 40% of our lawyers hit the 50-hour benchmark.



Hailey Tahk Named Oct. 2024 Volunteer of the Month by Lawyers for Good Government



Corporate associate **Hailey Tahk** has been named the October 2024 Volunteer of the Month by Lawyers for Good Government.

This monthly recognition spotlights those volunteers who enthusiastically dedicate their time to making meaningful differences. Hailey was cited for her pro bono work, which focuses on researching and advocating for reproductive rights.



Recognition (Cont.)

Firm Honored at CAMBA Fundraiser



On Nov. 14, Corporate partner and Diversity Committee Chair and Pro Bono Committee Co-Chair **Christopher Auguste** and Real Estate associate **Steven Ficurilli** attended CAMBA's 2024 Night Out fundraiser. Kramer Levin was honored at the event for the time and talent the firm has donated over the past eight years to CAMBA's entrepreneur clients and small businesses. The evening featured a **video** highlighting the great work Chris and Steven have done for the organization over the years, including the conception and realization of a number of small businesses. The recognition was accepted by **Chris Auguste** on behalf of the firm.

CAMBA's annual Night Out fundraiser supports an array of critical services provided to New Yorkers in need and celebrates partners who enthusiastically support the cause via family and community support, education and youth development, legal services, and more.



Pro Bono Highlights

Follow-to-Join Visas Reunite Clients With Their Mother

Kramer Levin successfully acquired follow-to-join visas for clients Mr. A and Ms. A and reunited them with their mother, Ms. B. Since obtaining asylum for Ms. B in 2018, Kramer Levin achieved lawful permanent resident status for Ms. B and worked to bring her minor children from West Africa to the United States as derivative asylees.



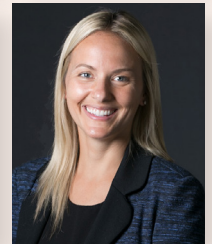
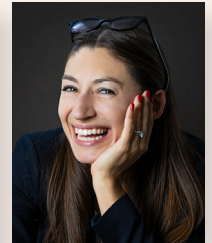
When Ms. B ran away from her family and fled West Africa for the U.S., she arranged for Mr. A and Ms. A to live in hiding from Ms. B's family, who had subjected Ms. B to female genital mutilation twice against her will and forced her into an arranged marriage. After years of worrying that her family would find and take Mr. A and Ms. A in retaliation and similarly require Ms. A to involuntarily undergo female genital mutilation, Ms. B is ecstatic and relieved that Mr. A and Ms. A have finally joined her in the U.S.

The team included Litigation associate **Dayna Chikamoto**, former associates Patrick Campbell and Jonathan Pepin, and former special counsel Christine Willgoos. Assistance was also provided by associate **Yashvi Ganeriwala**, special counsel **Andrew Ward** and paralegal **Santo Cipolla**.

Pro Bono Highlights (Cont.)

Asylum Obtained for Gay Jamaican Man

After almost six years of waiting, Kramer Levin obtained asylum for Mr. F, a gay Jamaican man. Mr. F was repeatedly attacked and persecuted in Jamaica on account of his sexual orientation. He was raped by a close friend of the family at a young age and even forced into a heterosexual marriage to appease his family. Real Estate partner **Seth Niedermayer** and associates **Jackie Ryu**, **Yasmeen Al-Bader** and **Melissa Drennan** handled the case, and a team of litigators, consisting of **Aaron Frankel**, **Randy Kreider** and **Cristina Martinez**, joined the effort by filing a mandamus suit to compel an interview in response to the lengthy interim period.

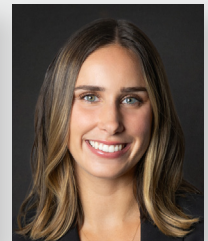


Research Work Supports Sanctuary for Families in Their Fight Against Femicide

Sanctuary for Families is New York's leading service provider and advocate for survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking and related forms of gender violence. Sanctuary has recently focused efforts to combat the rising rates of femicide (that is, the killing of women because they are women). Sanctuary approached Kramer Levin to provide research on this important topic. In September 2022, Kramer Levin produced a 54-page paper analyzing aspects of femicide within the U.S. and internationally, with detailed statistics and recommendations. The team consisted of **Melissa Drennan**, **Natali Rey** and **Pamela Badolato** and former associates Emma Cervantes and Jennifer Weisser.

Thereafter, Sanctuary successfully used Kramer Levin's findings and ideas to create a working group at Sanctuary to focus on preventing femicide and improving systems to identify and address the risk of femicide. Sanctuary then set its sights on advocating for legislation in the United States to combat femicide.

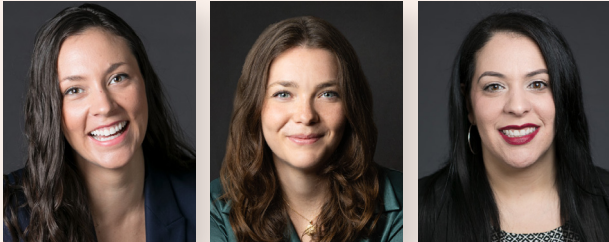
They asked Kramer Levin to analyze other countries' laws against femicide in order to provide a model standard for legislation here at home. Kramer Levin produced a 25-page analysis of international femicide laws in existence, including statistics, details and the mechanics of such legislation. Sanctuary presented Kramer Levin's work to the rest of their femicide committee and is moving forward with their work to propose femicide legislative action in the U.S. The team consisted of **Melissa Drennan** and **Santo Cipolla** and former associate Jennifer Weisser.



Pro Bono Highlights (Cont.)

Enabling an Asylum Client's Family Reunion

Rita D'Souza, Celeste Williams and Ines Dominguez successfully petitioned for our longtime asylum client, who was granted asylum in January 2023, to bring her two teenage children to the U.S. from Ecuador as derivatives of her asylee status. After more than 10 years of separation and legal hurdles, the family reunited at JFK. The teens met their younger half-siblings in person for the first time.



Amicus Brief Filed in Support of Gun Victims' Right to Redress

On Jan. 17, Kramer Levin filed an amicus curiae brief in the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of the March For Our Lives Action Fund, a nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating the epidemic of gun violence. The brief, filed in *Smith & Wesson Brands, Inc., et al. v. Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, supports the affirmance of a 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision holding that the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) does not bar Mexico's lawsuit against seven gun manufacturers and one distributor for damages arising from the sale of firearms to drug cartels in Mexico.

The PLCAA prohibits civil actions against licensed firearms manufacturers and sellers for harms caused solely by the criminal misuse of otherwise properly functioning firearms and ammunition by third parties. The PLCAA contains several exceptions, however, including the predicate exception, which allows lawsuits against manufacturers or sellers that knowingly violate a statute applicable to the sale or marketing of their products when that violation proximately causes the harm for which a plaintiff seeks relief.

Kramer Levin's brief provides firsthand accounts of survivors of gun violence who rely on the predicate exception or on traditional notions of aiding and abetting unlawful conduct and proximate cause to seek redress for their injuries. The brief argues that the gun manufacturers' interpretation of the PLCAA and proximate cause would close the courthouse doors to victims and survivors who were foreseeably harmed by the unlawful conduct of firearms manufacturers and sellers. The brief urges the Supreme Court to reject the manufacturers' arguments.

Litigation partner [Michael Dell](#) and associates [Harry Morgenthau](#), [Katharine Rubery](#), [Shaked Sivan](#) and [Drew Zagami](#) prepared the brief. More information is available on the [Kramer Levin website](#).

