PUBLIC COUNSEL CELEBRATES THE
2019 PRO BONO AWARD WINNERS

JENNIFER MORA OF SEYFARTH SHAW LLP

nominated by Public Counsel’s Community Development Project

The Community Development Project extends special thanks to Jennifer Mora of Seyfarth Shaw LLP for the work she has done on behalf of nonprofit organizations in Los Angeles. Over the past year and a half, Jennifer has become one of our "go-to" pro bono attorneys when an organization needs help with an employment law issue. On a number of occasions, she has volunteered to take on multiple matters simultaneously, as well as cheerfully agreeing to take on a new matter immediately after finishing the previous one. When employment issues arise for smaller nonprofits, they can be both highly distracting and time-sensitive - often requiring advice in a matter of hours or days. Jen always replies quickly and generously to our requests for help, and is exceptionally responsive to the clients. This has made her an invaluable resource to both the Community Development Project and the nonprofits we serve. Jen has been especially helpful to our community clinic clients, guiding them through legal issues ranging from offers of employment to conflicts with current employees to the drafting of volunteer policies and employee handbooks. This help permits these clinics to quickly resolve pressing issues and implement best practices so that they can focus on their important work of serving low-income patients throughout LA County. Last but not least, Jen's efforts have included leveraging the time of multiple additional pro bono attorneys at her firm, which has greatly benefited nonprofits that might not otherwise have access to such resources.

GREG BORDO AND JUSTIN BRANDT OF BLANK ROME

nominated by Public Counsel’s Consumer Rights & Economic Justice Project

This Award is in recognition of the substantial work Blank Rome has performed in representing an elderly couple who seemed doomed to foreclosure due to taxes assessed through the Property Assessed Clean Energy, or PACE, Program. CREJ nominated the Blank Rome team because of the team’s exceptional service and leadership in furthering the rights of victims of the devastatingly impactful PACE Program scheme. CREJ urgently needed an attorney to represent Douglas Hubbard, an African American veteran, and his wife Norma, both well into their eighties, who had been targeted by a home improvement salesman who used forgery and lies to sign up the Hubbards for over $60K worth of high interest financing. The salesmen deliberately misrepresented that a government program for low-income seniors would make the financing arrangement affordable for them. After their annual property taxes increased by over 600%, a rate they could not afford, their reverse mortgage servicer was aggressive in pursuing foreclosure. The Blank Rome team filed suit on the Hubbards’ behalf, and reached a settlement making the Hubbards whole again. The Hubbards are now able to live out their years in their family home, surrounded by their 5 children and many grandchildren. We appreciate very much all that the Bank Rome team did on this matter and that
Blank Rome continues to do for the clients of the Consumer Rights and Economic Justice Project and Public Counsel.

JOHN MELISSINOS OF GREENBERG GLUSKER

*nominated by Consumer Rights & Economic Justice’s Debtor Assistance Project*

The Consumer Law Project's Debtor Assistance Project would like to honor John Melissinos and his firm of Greenberg Glusker - post-humously. Mr. Melissinos unexpectedly passed away two weeks ago, but DAP would like recognize him and his firm for their pro bono contributions. John took on several Chapter 7 pro bono matters, successfully litigated a student loan discharge, and conducted fundraising on behalf of Public Counsel's DAP. When he represented one client, Bill Reilly, with discharging his student loans, Mr. Reilly was relieved that this heavy weight had finally been lifted off his shoulders. Mr. Mellisinos recently took on another Student Loan Discharge case and his firm will continue representing our client, Dante Venegas. He took on the case with his partner, Keith Banner at Greenberg Glusker and DAP ould like to recognize Greenberg's longstanding commitment to Public Counsel.

DAVID SMITH OF CAMPBELL SMITH LAW

*nominated by the Community Development Project’s Early Care & Education Law Unit*

The Early Care & Education Law Unit is proud to honor Mr. David Smith for its pro bono volunteer award. Mr. Smith is a fantastic volunteer, who has repeatedly jumped in on short notice to help us with time sensitive real estate and eviction litigation matters. Mr. Smith helped us protect the interests of a child care provider who had spent thousands of dollars improving a facility in order to operate a child care center only to have her lease suddenly terminated without cause and notice. Through affirmative litigation, Mr. Smith was able to obtain a settlement for the client to recoup some of the funds she spent on improvements and enable her to open a center at an alternative location. David has repeatedly volunteered to assist our clients, including child care providers, nonprofits serving low income communities, and individuals at risk of homelessness, with complex real estate and eviction matters. We very much appreciate his commitment to the low income communities we serve and his understanding of the issues faced by our clients. His volunteer hours have been invaluable for building strong and healthy communities.

ADAM L. YARIAN OF GIBSON DUNN

*nominated by the Federal Pro Se Clinic*

The Federal Pro Se Clinic recognizes Adam L. Yarian as our volunteer of the year. The FPSC nominates Adam because of the outstanding commitment he has shown to assisting disadvantaged people who are litigating without an attorney in the Central District of California. Pro se litigants in the federal court system are often confused and overwhelmed by the variety of procedural hurdles facing them, and Adam has made a substantial impact in the lives of many individual people. Adam is an accomplished attorney at Gibson Dunn yet still finds the time to volunteer frequently with FPSC. At the Clinic, Adam deals with both plaintiffs and defendants in areas of the law as diverse as civil rights, employment discrimination, government benefits, and intellectual property. He has helped numerous
clients prepare complaints, answers, discovery, motions, settlement agreements, and prepare for mediation conferences. To Adam, each client is important and each client meeting is an opportunity to explain the law and explore options to address real problems affecting our clients. Our heartfelt thanks go to Adam Yarian for his sincere commitment to helping others achieve better lives.

**JASMIN YANG AND CHERYL SCRANTON OF LEWIS BRISBOIS BISGAARD & SMITH LLP**

*nominated by the Children’s Rights Project’s Guardianship Team.*

The Guardianship Team of the Children’s Rights Project extends special thanks to Jasmin Yang and the firm of Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP for the important work Jasmin has done to help children in legal guardianships with legal name changes. The Guardianship Team nominates Jasmin to receive its pro bono award because of her exceptional skill and commitment to our project. When the Guardianship team first identified the need for legal name changes among our Guardianship Clinic litigants, we were at a loss. With no expertise in-house, we weren’t sure how we would assist the growing numbers of children needing legal name changes. Jasmin immediately responded to our call for help and took on her first name change case. She researched the name change process for children in guardianships, filed her first case and was successful in changing the names of two brothers who lived with their stepfather/guardian. After her first success Jasmin became our go-to name change attorney. She has taken case after case, and shared success after success. Jasmin worked on her pro bono name change cases while on maternity leave, and continued seamlessly after returning to work from maternity leave, showing a deep dedication to her clients.

Jasmin understands the incredible impact a name change offers a child with connections to a new family. Jasmin helped to change the last names of two brothers who live with their stepfather/guardian. The two boys lost their mother to cancer and felt connected to their stepfather, yet after losing their mother felt unmoored. Jasmin thoughtfully guided the boys and their father through the name change process and on the day of the hearing, celebrated the new and meaningful connection to their stepfather. The boys and their stepfather keep in touch with Public Counsel and share how important their new names are at each moment. Following this initial name change case, Jasmin has continued to assist countless guardians with name changes for children in their care. We thank and honor Jasmin for her consistency, her empathy, and her compassion in providing excellent representation in her pro bono work.

**BOB WILSON, WILL WATTS, BARBARA LUTTENBERGER, JULIANNA SERRANO, GLORIA MEDEL OF THE ALL SAINTS CHURCH CLINIC**

*nominated by the Public Counsel’s Homelessness Prevention Law Project*

The All Saints Church Clinic has been a successful partnership between congregants of All Saints Church, the Pasadena Bar Association, and Public Counsel since 2012. The Legal Clinic operates monthly at the Jackie Robinson Center in the City of Pasadena, and has served an average of 20-30 individuals and families every month since it was founded. The clinic began with a vision that All Saints Church congregant and attorney Bob Wilson had to serve the local community. He was joined by All Saints Church member and attorney Will Watts (formerly the Directing Attorney of Public Counsel’s Homelessness Prevention Law Project) and paralegal Barbara Luttenberger, joined shortly thereafter by congregant Juliana Serrano. Initially volunteers were drawn from lawyers and others attending All Saints Church, but the volunteer pool expanded when the Pasadena Bar Association entered the partnership after the first year. In its eighth year,
the clinic continues to provide a valuable and much-needed community resource and our reach continues to spread. The numbers of clients we serve each month is always growing – in the month of April 2019 we served 43 individuals and families. Our pro bono attorneys assist clients in the areas of family law, criminal defense, tenants’ rights, consumer law, trust and estate matters, public benefits, general civil matters and more. We are constantly attracting new pro bono attorneys from a variety of practice areas and years of experience recruited by our current pro bono volunteers and through outreach provided by Gloria Medel of the Pasadena Bar Association. Newer attorneys volunteer to gain client experience and mentorship while our more seasoned volunteers are gratified by continuing to donate their expertise and time to the many legal needs of our less advantaged neighbors. This clinic would not exist without this collective effort and the dedication of the current leadership team of Bob Wilson, Barbara Luttenberger, Gloria Medel and Julianna Serrano. Public Counsel is truly grateful to our leadership team and to all the individuals who contribute their time, compassion and expertise to make this program successful.

SIDLEY AUSTIN LLP

*nominated by Public Counsel’s Opportunity Under Law Project.*

*Specific team members include Carter Phillips, Tacy Flint, Joshua Anderson, James Perez, Mark Haddad, Amy Lally, Ellyce Cooper, Jennifer Clark, Kevin Fee, Bridget Johnsen, Michael Andolina, Daniel Craig

Public Counsel’s Opportunity Under Law Project would like to thank Sidley Austin LLP for their work this year on both the Gary B. v. Whitmer (formerly Gary B. v. Snyder) litigation and the Ms. J.P. v. Barr (formerly Ms. J.P. v. Sessions) litigation. Teams from Sidley Austin offices across the country have dedicated countless pro bono hours to fight for justice on behalf of our clients. The Gary B. team from Sidley has worked tirelessly to defend Detroit student’s right to access literacy and to ensure they receive the high-quality education that all children in this country deserve. As the case continues on appeal, the dedicated advocacy of Sidley’s lawyers continues to support the students of Detroit in their groundbreaking lawsuit. Then, when the Trump administration enacted the unconscionable and unconstitutional family separation policy, Sidley lawyers again joined forces with OUL to file a lawsuit on behalf of a class of parents who were forcibly separated from their children, seeking immediate essential supportive services to redress the trauma deliberately inflicted by the government. We thank all the Sidley Austin lawyers who have partnered with us on these critical cases to fight for the rights of our clients.

DANIEL KIEFER

*nominated by Public Counsel’s Women and Girls Rights Project*

Public Counsel’s Women and Girls’ Rights Project (WGR) has selected Daniel Kiefer to receive its 2019 Public Counsel Pro Bono Award. Dan’s exceptional work in researching and drafting a training manual for the Project on employment law issues has provided the WGR Team with an invaluable resource. This manual will be a critical tool that the Team will utilize in onboarding new pro bono attorneys who are eager to assist WGR’s clients, but who may not have prior employment law experience. His investment of more than 150 hours to complete the manual has established a learning platform that the Project can carry forward far into the future as it assists vulnerable women and girls who are struggling to access justice. WGR could not be prouder of Dan Kiefer’s immeasurable pro bono contributions.
The Adoptions Project nominated Sarah Binning for the Pro Bono Award because of fierce determination to advocate for two young children when no one else could take the case.

In 2017, the Adoptions Project referred a two-child adoption to Cooley, LLP. One of Sarah’s colleagues smoothly handled the adoption and an initial request to correct current and past benefits. The client, a monolingual Spanish-speaker, was adopting her two grandchildren who had suffered exposure to drugs and other trauma that left them with several challenges, even at their young ages of 3 and 6. The children showed signs for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and they displayed aggressive behaviors that required therapy. Despite these issues, the family only received the minimum rate in benefits even though it was evident that the children’s special needs qualified them for additional assistance. When Sarah’s colleague was unable to continue representation, Sarah jumped in and immediately began her own in-depth analysis of the children’s cases. From the onset of her involvement, Sarah was a strong advocate for the family.

When DCFS finally approved over $16,000 for the six-year-old, Sarah diligently conducted her own independent accounting to make sure the family received everything that DCFS owed to them. And when DCFS denied the three-year-old any increases, Sarah spent nearly a year collecting records, connecting the child to services, and negotiating with DCFS to provide the three-year-old with an enhanced rate. Due to all of Sarah’s hard work, the family obtained over $8,000 in additional retroactive benefits, and the children will continue to receive higher rates as long as they continue to display severe behavioral issues.

When Public Counsel spoke to the adoptive parent to help translate the outcomes of the case, it was clear that Sarah had deeply impacted the family and the parent expressed how eternally grateful she was for the peace of mind that Sarah had given her.

The Adoptions Project is also extremely grateful to Sarah for serving as an Adoptions Coordinator at Cooley while she was in the Los Angeles office. As an Adoptions Coordinator, Sarah was essential in connecting families with a pro bono volunteers at Cooley, coordinating assignments, keeping deadlines, and mentoring other attorneys. Sarah’s impact on foster children and their adopting families was exponential.


dated to the rights of caregivers to receive the full benefits to which they are entitled is ensuring that our country’s disabled veterans will have the hope and ongoing stability they deserve. This Team, which includes Joshua Bennett, Scott Carlton, Marty Edelman, Brian Gzowski, Kurt Hansson, Randall Johnston, Andy LeGolvan, Brian Moran, Barry Sher, and Igor Timofeyev, has consistently dedicated its full attention and resources in researching, coordinating, and implementing multi-tiered strategies to compel the Veterans’ Administration to implement the Caregiver Program with fairness and respect for the rule of law. Although there are more steps to be taken in the fight for justice
for veterans’ caregivers, Public Counsel and CVA could not be prouder of your generous and immeasurable pro bono contributions centered on healing our broken caregiver system. Thank you!

SABRINA DAMAST AND JOSHUA LEE

nominated by Public Counsel’s Immigrant Rights Project

In the words of my colleague Joseph Weiner, Sabrina Damast is a superstar. She came into our lives in June of 2014 when she agreed to represent an asylum seeker one week before his scheduled asylum interview. The client, a doctor in Congo, treated women who survived rapes by soldiers. When he reported the crimes to the government officials, he was detained and beaten. Sabrina dove right in. She supplemented the client’s skeletal asylum application, got up to speed on Congolese country conditions and prepped the client for the interview. The case was granted. However, before the grant approval notice even arrived, Sabrina was already hard at work on another pro bono Public Counsel case—this time for a Ugandan woman who was attacked multiple times for her sexual orientation. This client was also granted asylum. Since then, Sabrina has assisted over dozen IRP clients. Among them are a woman and her family who were violently targeted by a gang in El Salvador, a Honduran mother who was sexually abused from the age of ten and whose children were kidnapped by her ex-partner, an unaccompanied minor child whose unstable housing situation made it difficult to stay in touch with him, and a Cuban political activist who was fighting for a free and democratic Cuba. And that’s just the asylum cases! Sabrina has also used her skills to represent children eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status in both state court and before the immigration service. She generously gave her time to visit our UCLA Asylum Clinic with her former client to share their experiences navigating the asylum system. And she tirelessly provides advice and assistance to IRP staff attorneys on post-conviction relief, complex immigration issues and in tricky conflict situations. We are honored to recognize Sabrina with the 2019 Pro Bono Award because of her intellect, responsiveness and excellent judgment but most importantly, because we know that her clients will always be well served by her compassion and the commitment she has to them.

The Immigrants’ Rights Project is thrilled to recognize Josh Lee with its 2019 Pro Bono Award. Josh’s start with IRP began with winning asylum for a citizen of Ghana detained by immigration authorities after fleeing persecution in his country. Josh then shifted from asylum to work on emerging and critical legal issues around special immigrant juvenile status; issues which impact thousands of immigrant children who have been subject to parental abuse, abandonment or neglect, and have a path to permanent residency if they can successfully obtain SIJS findings from a state court. In 2015, the IRP reached out to Irell and Manella to file a writ to the California Appellate Court after Bryan, our 17-year-old client, was denied SIJS findings by a California family court. The request for pro bono help was not a typical request. IRP needed an attorney who within days could file a writ petition, as Bryan was within weeks of turning 18, when he would “age-out” of eligibility for the relief he sought from the family court. Josh sprang into action, recruiting colleagues to work around the clock to file with the California Court of Appeals, and his work led to a reversal from the trial court, and ultimately permanent residency for Bryan. Both of Bryan’s siblings had been murdered in Honduras so Josh’s work was truly lifesaving. When months later IRP’s client Bianka found herself in a situation similar to Bryan’s—facing denial of a request for SIJS findings from a family court – Josh again sprang into action. This time Josh argued before a very hostile panel of the California Appellate Court, which then issued a truly stunning published decision, which could have rendered thousands of children in California ineligible for SIJS. Over several years, Josh led an army of lawyers to overturn this decision, and his relentless and brilliant advocacy led to a decision from the California Supreme Court, this time going our way. As a result of
the Bianka M. decision – which addressed numerous legal issues, thousands of children can now obtain the permanent protections offered by SIJS. Through all the years of pro bono work, Josh has been the consummate team player, leading us with grace and humor, and never lost sight of what our work is about: keep immigrant families safe and together. Josh is now in-house counsel at Origin, and is already hard at work on his next IRP assignment.