



Justice in Every Borough.

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Legal Aid Honors Key Partners at 2023 Pro Bono Publico Awards Ceremony

Wesley R. Powell of Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP; Dechert LLP; and 264 Individual Attorneys Honored

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society held the 2023 Pro Bono Publico Awards Ceremony at the Prince George Ballroom on Monday, October 30th, honoring individual attorneys and law firms for their outstanding and sustained achievements in pro bono services.

Each year, The Legal Aid Society works with over 100 law firms and national law schools across New York City. The firms recognized were nominated by Legal Aid staff in every borough for their exceptional commitment to ensure that no New Yorker is denied the right to equal justice. The Honorable Rowan Wilson, Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals, presented the awards to the honorees.

The Public Interest Law Leadership Award was presented to Wesley R. Powell of Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP in recognition of his extraordinary contributions as a volunteer attorney, for his constant support of Legal Aid and its clients, and as a leader of Willkie's outstanding pro bono program and Chair of the firm's Pro Bono Committee.

Powell's work alongside the staff of the Health Law Unit, LGBTQ Law & Policy Initiative and Law Reform Unit has impacted thousands of disempowered New Yorkers. Most recently, Legal Aid and a Willkie team led by Powell won a landmark settlement in *Ciaramella v. Zucker*, which will provide up to five million New Yorkers access to dental care previously not covered by Medicaid. The lawsuit challenged New York's restrictions on Medicaid coverage for medically necessary dental care for root canals, crowns, replacement dentures and dental implants.

Powell and Willkie were also co-counsel with Legal Aid and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project on *Cruz v. Zucker*, a groundbreaking case which in 2016 resulted in the provision of gender affirming care to transgender Medicaid recipients in New York state. Powell has previously been honored with Legal Aid's Pro Bono Publico Award six times.

The 2023 Honorable Jonathan Lippman New York Pro Bono Publico & Public Service Law Firm Award was presented to Dechert LLP for its exceptional pro bono commitment to Legal Aid and its clients, contributing nearly 7,000 hours of legal services over the past two years. Dechert staff provided critical assistance to clients

in every area of Legal Aid Society practice including the preservation of public benefits with the Civil Practice, fighting for the rights of families with the Juvenile Rights Practice and providing outstanding appellate advocacy with the Criminal Defense Practice. Dechert LLP has clearly demonstrated that the firm shares Judge Lippman's goal of "making equal justice for all not just an ideal, but a reality."

"The impact of pro bono volunteers on our ability to zealously advocate for our clients is indispensable and we are incredibly proud to honor the contributions of these individuals and firms," said **Twyla Carter, Attorney-in-Chief and Chief Executive Officer of The Legal Aid Society**. "We are deeply appreciative of the undeniable impact their work has in the lives of our clients, and look forward to continuing to partner with these firms to advance justice for the communities we serve."

"Tonight's honorees were all nominated by Legal Aid staff who worked alongside them. Through individual client representations, projects focused on critical client needs, and groundbreaking affirmative litigation, these pro bono partnerships have led to increased positive outcomes for so many New Yorkers. This event provides us an opportunity to celebrate both the pro bono volunteers and Legal Aid staff whose joint efforts make those outcomes possible," said **Lou Sartori, Chief Counsel of the Pro Bono Practice at The Legal Aid Society**.

The Honorable Rowan Wilson, Chief Judge of the State of New York, said: "Pro bono legal work plays an instrumental role in providing meaningful legal representation to those who cannot afford it. It is difficult for courts to deliver justice when the scales are wildly imbalanced because one side is well-represented and the other lacks representation of any kind. On behalf of the Unified Court System, I offer our gratitude to The Legal Aid Society for its commitment to encouraging and supporting pro bono work, including through its annual Pro Bono Awards that celebrate the crucial work of the Society and its partners in delivering justice to New Yorkers in need, which goal the Unified Court System shares and remains committed to."

Wesley R. Powell of Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP, said, "I am grateful and honored to receive The Public Interest Law Leadership Award. Willkie and I are incredibly proud of our firm's long standing pro bono partnership with The Legal Aid Society, and working with the brilliant Legal Aid teams to expand access to medically-necessary care for Medicaid-eligible New Yorkers and achieve landmark changes to law in the *Cruz* and *Ciaramella* cases has been a highlight of my legal career."

"Our commitment to pro bono work is a fundamental part of our firm's ethos, as it's not just about the hours we put in, but the lives we touch and the justice we help secure for those who need it most," said **Mauricio España, Managing Partner of Dechert's New York office**, who is also a Legal Aid Society Board member. "Our partnership with The Legal Aid Society is a vital part of this mission and we are deeply honored to receive this award."

Last year, 1,984 volunteers and interns donated 192,061 hours of legal assistance to the clients of The Legal Aid Society. But no metrics can adequately quantify what pro bono assistance means to a family facing homelessness, a client whose rights are violated by unlawful police conduct, or a child in foster care whose educational needs are not being met. For over 145 years, The Legal Aid Society has worked together with the private bar to provide life changing legal assistance and deliver "Justice In Every Borough."

Photos: Credit Isseu Diouf Campbell at Afrikanspot.

- Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society; Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney of the Civil Practice at The Legal Aid Society; Mauricio Espana, New York Managing Partner at Dechert LLP & LAS Board of Directors; Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals Rowan Wilson; Mark Thierfelder, Global Co-Chair at Dechert LLP; Twyla Carter, Attorney-In-Chief and CEO of The Legal Aid Society.

Photo: <https://legalaidnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BP-2023-1-scaled.jpg>.

- Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals Rowan Wilson.; Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney of the Civil Practice at LAS; Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society; Belkys Garcia, Staff Attorney with the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society; Wesley Powell, Partner Willkie Farr & Gallagher; Twyla Carter, Attorney-In-Chief and CEO of The Legal Aid Society.

Photo: <https://legalaidnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BP-2023-2-scaled.jpg>.

- Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals Rowan Wilson.

Photo: <https://legalaidnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BP-2023-3-scaled.jpg>.

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The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For over 145 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. <https://www.legalaidnyc.org>