

PRO BONO HOT LIST | A SPECIAL REPORT

“Faster, higher, stronger,” may be the Olympic creed, but it could also serve as the battle cry of the law firms on our 2016 Pro Bono Hot List. Lawyers volunteered their services to fight for voting rights, for veterans and to protect free speech across the globe. They bolstered efforts against human trafficking, advocated for prisoners, for students and for transgender people seeking health care. These are their stories.

KIRKLAND & ELLIS

Firm Guards Voting Rights in Vital Case

When the North Carolina NAACP and the Advancement Project challenged a North Carolina law imposing some of the most restrictive voting requirements in the nation, they knew they would need heavy-hitting litigation support from trial through potentially the U.S. Supreme Court. Kirkland & Ellis and the firm’s Daniel Donovan stepped up to the plate.

Donovan and his clients have been on a legal roller coaster since filing the initial complaint in 2013 in federal district court in North Carolina.

From that court, they’ve been to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, the Supreme Court and back to the district court for a full trial on the merits last summer.

The three-week trial ended in July 2015 and the pending decision is likely to have major implications for voting rights throughout the nation. The lawsuit—*North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP v. McCrory*—contends the state law violates Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and the 14th and 15th amendments of the U.S. Constitution by imposing intentional and disproportionate burdens on voters of color.

“It has been a fabulous experience, particularly for a lot of our younger lawyers,”

Donovan, a Washington commercial litigator, said.

More than 20 Kirkland lawyers have worked on the case at different times.

There have been more than 100 depositions taken.

“Frankly it’s a big issue—people’s right to vote,” Donovan said. “It’s the kind of pro bono we’ve been doing for the last few years, where we can invest money, time and people, and yet still do pro bono for individuals. But this is a big, marquee case.”

Advancement Project co-director Penda Hair said the firm and Donovan have played “a critical role” in the voting rights fight. Donovan, she said, has worked “tirelessly” to raise the stories of voters of color affected by the state restrictions.

The firm remains committed to the case, win or lose in the district court.

Noting probable appeals, Donovan said, “Both sides have a long road ahead,” likely ending again in the Supreme Court.

In April, four days into a jury trial in Los Angeles Superior Court, Kirkland



DIEGO M. RADZINSKI

DANIEL DONOVAN

also reached a \$2.18 million settlement on behalf of more than 100 low-income tenants who sued their landlord for negligence. The tenants—mostly non-English speaking, elderly and children—had endured deplorable living conditions for three years.

And in October, the Foundation for Education in Honduras, a nonprofit organization created by the firm’s lawyers and employees, broke ground on the first of five primary schools that it has committed to build in that country.

More than 200 Kirkland employees have donated money and more than 560 pro bono hours to the foundation.

—MARCIA COYLE