

John H. Pickering Award Presentation

2013 Pro Bono Institute Annual Dinner – November 7

Remarks from Richard Hays, Managing Partner of Alston & Bird

I would like to express my appreciation to the WilmerHale firm and the Pro Bono Institute for selecting Alston & Bird as this year's recipient of the John H. Pickering Award. We are humbled to receive this award named for John H. Pickering, an attorney whose career I have long admired. Most of you know that John Pickering clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Frank Murphy, to whom he attributed his commitment to pro bono, stating that Justice Murphy influenced him through an "insistence that the law be used as a tool for the public good."

Being recognized as one such law firm that strives to positively impact the public good, in the legacy of John Pickering and the WilmerHale firm, which has itself recently been named a Pro Bono Firm of the Year by Law 360, is an honor, and we are grateful.

I would especially like to extend our appreciation to the Pro Bono Institute, and to Esther, Tammy and Reena in particular, who have worked closely with our firm over the years as we have continued to develop and implement policies and programs that ensure our attorneys, paralegals and staff have the opportunity to engage in meaningful pro bono matters.

Philip H. Alston, Jr. understood the need to provide legal services to those who would otherwise not be able to afford representation, causing him to be one of the founders of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society in 1924. This tradition of pro bono continues today, enriching the culture of our 10 offices and providing the foundation upon which we combine our passion for justice with our talents as attorneys to positively impact the numerous individuals and organizations we represent on a pro bono basis.

The type of pro bono efforts in which we engage is as varied as the personalities of our attorneys. While there is no one area of focus for our efforts, we attempt to implement innovative solutions and to address unmet legal needs. Whether it be leading an effort to establish the Georgia Asylum and Immigration Network (GAIN), an organization providing representation to asylum seekers and immigrant victims of human trafficking, adopting a wills project that faced a funding shortage forcing the nonprofit agency to discontinue such services, representing victims of domestic violence, parents involved in international child abduction cases, and children in education-related hearings, or advising small nonprofits that deliver essential services to the poor, the overarching goal in all of our pro bono endeavors is to support and strengthen our communities and increase access to justice.

The theme of this year's dinner is "Collaborating for Justice." Collaborate means "to work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something." And it does indeed take collaboration between and among multiple parties to work towards justice. Justice in our legal system cannot be fully realized if we are solely focused on rowing our individual oar, but by pulling together in a synchronized movement, i.e. collaborating, we can move toward justice.

At Alston & Bird, we are fortunate to have a rich network of pro bono collaborators. These include the Pro Bono Institute, which helps us and numerous other law firms, legal departments and nonprofits think strategically about pro bono and develop the policies and programs that support pro bono efforts; nonprofit legal service providers, which work with us to provide training and supervision to our attorneys so we can handle an ever-increasing variety and number of cases; other law firms with whom we work to address systemic legal challenges; corporate legal departments, which partner with us on meaningful pro bono projects; and of course our pro bono clients for whom we advocate. We are grateful to be able to work together with so many to make access to justice a reality for those who cannot afford to pay for legal services.

Before closing, I would like to recognize Mary Benton, our Pro Bono Partner, and Cheryl Naja, our Director of Pro Bono and Community Service, who work on a daily basis to ensure that our pro bono program thrives, so we can continue to provide meaningful pro bono services.

Once again, thank you for recognizing the efforts Alston & Bird is making to work towards the public good and collaborate for justice. We look forward to celebrating the work of the Pro Bono Institute for many years to come.