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## The 2008 NLJ Pro Bono Awards

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Each year, *The National Law Journal* recognizes the firms that have done the most to uphold the legal profession's responsibility to ensure that people's legal rights aren't contingent on their ability to pay. We dig through scores of nominations and conduct our own research, looking for the firms and individuals who made the biggest commitments in time and money on behalf of people and causes without the means to pay a lawyer. Making these selections is always difficult. This year, we settled on four firms.

### OVERVIEW

#### 'What lawyering is all about'



Pro bono isn't always warm and fuzzy. Sometimes the most important work involves unpopular causes and sometimes you lose, as happened in the case of Aaron Lee Jones, put to death while his pro bono counsel from White & Case frantically litigated a civil rights challenge to Alabama's lethal injection protocol. Attorneys who take these cases say they do so because of their professional obligation to close gaps in the legal system and because they feel they have to take the long view, hoping that even a defeat can move the system closer to greater equity.

### THE WINNERS

#### COZEN O'CONNOR

##### A 'watershed' victory for immigrants' rights



A local ordinance in Hazleton, Pa., would have required every apartment dweller to prove lawful citizenship status in order to get an occupancy permit. They would have fined anyone employing or providing housing to illegal aliens. They would have declared English the city's official language. Those ordinances won't be enforced — at least, not anytime soon. A legal team led by Cozen O'Connor attorneys persuaded a federal judge to block the measures. The legal victory, which is under appeal, could provide a corrective for other local officials from cracking down on noncitizens who lack official permission to live and work in the United States.

#### KILPATRICK STOCKTON

##### Providing succor to desperate parents



When it comes to litigating international child abduction cases, Kilpatrick Stockton wrote the book. More than two dozen of the Atlanta firm's lawyers authored a training manual that provides the legal tools attorneys need to effectively represent a parent whose child has been taken to a foreign country without his or her permission.

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## SIDLEY AUSTIN

### Somebody has to look out for the veterans



Sidley Austin attorney Ron Flagg rallied lawyers at his firm and at other law firms nationwide to make a difference in the lives of a U.S. war veterans seeking government disability benefits. As many as 400 attorneys at 50 law firms have shown interest in the pro bono program Flagg created, and 70 cases have been parceled out for review during the project's first two months. Flagg eventually hopes to be sending 100 cases per month to volunteer lawyers.

## SUSMAN GODFREY

### Litigator put money where his mouth was



Attorneys for a Texas utility were surprised when crack litigators from Susman Godfrey turned up to oppose plans to build 10 coal-fired power plants — it was the first time the utility had faced the level of resources a determined pro bono litigation team could bring. With the firm's assistance, a coalition of cities won an administrative battle to derail the projects, opening what could be a new front in the campaign against global warming.

See also: [Last year's winners](#)

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