

A New Era for Change

BY JOANN THACH



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In the last few years, we have seen a significant shift in the United States’ approach to immigration. This includes implementation of travel bans targeting nationals of certain countries, adoption of a policy separating migrant families detained at the border, and allegations of squalid conditions, overcrowding, and preventable deaths occurring in detention centers throughout the country.

One area that has come under particular scrutiny is access to legal counsel for those facing removal proceedings before an Administrative Law Judge with the Executive Office of Immigration Review. In the criminal justice system, all defendants facing jail time are provided an attorney even if they cannot afford one. However, because deportation is classified as a civil rather than criminal sanction, detainees in removal proceedings are not captured by the constitutional protections under the Sixth Amendment that apply to criminal defendants. As such, many in removal proceedings are forced to proceed with their case unrepresented.

The Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project provides free legal services to those in immigration detention and also acts as a conduit to connect those in need of legal representation with lawyers engaged in private practice. Snell & Wilmer’s collaboration with the Florence Project has allowed our attorneys to get involved and advocate for those caught up in removal proceedings. Gabrielle Morlock, an associate in our Tucson office,

has represented a detained minor in removal proceedings and shared her experience.

“It is absolutely heartbreaking to see what these children have gone through. But time and time again they remind me of how resilient children can be. No matter what they have gone through, they focus on the positive and ‘what can be’ rather than ‘what has been,’” said Morlock. “I am so grateful to be a part of their journey and will continue to fight for that chance.”

Ben Nucci, associate and co-chair of Snell & Wilmer’s pro bono committee, is on the board of the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project and remains invested in their mission, advocating for asylum seekers to ensure that everyone has access to legal representation and that their voice does not get lost in the complexities of the legal system. We are proud to be recognized in the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project’s 2020 Pro Bono Awards and strive to continue providing legal representation to some of the most vulnerable members of our community.



JOANN THACH IS SNELL & WILMER’S DIRECTOR OF DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH. SHE OVERSEES THE FIRM’S COMMITMENT TO EXPANDING AND SUPPORTING DIVERSITY, FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE AND SUPPORTING INITIATIVES THAT POSITIVELY IMPACT THE GREATER COMMUNITY. THACH HAS A LONG HISTORY AND PASSION IN ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE, EQUITY AND INCLUSION.