

ATJ PRO BONO CHAMPION

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What kind of Pro Bono work are you involved in?

I recently saw two pro bono appeals through the entire appellate process. The first was *Rhine v. Deaton*, which involved the rights of indigent Texans to counsel, and the second was *Jenkins v. Clark*, a First Amendment case. I also wrote an amicus brief, which I ended up presenting in oral arguments, for *Palmer v. Waxahachie*, the case where a student was expelled for wearing an “Edwards for President” shirt to school. At Yavneh Academy [a Jewish high school in Dallas where Baruch is an assistant principal], I helped organize a fundraiser called “An Evening with the Chief” featuring Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson.

Can you talk a little bit about “An Evening with the Chief?”

It was a funny way that it came about. A student group at Yavneh Academy puts on a really cool event every fall, and we wanted to do something for the spring. I had just been at the Texas Access to Justice Commission Gala in Austin where I heard Jeffrey Toobin speak. The president of the student group was writing her senior thesis on Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and had read Toobin’s book, so she had a lot of questions for me. The president, who was 17 or 18 at the time, was inspired and suggested that we do an event to highlight access to justice.

We raised more than \$15,000 for the Texas Access to Justice Foundation. But far more important than the money is that the kids, many of whom want to become lawyers, are now sensitized to this issue. I’ve found that the things you are passionate about in high school, you are passionate about for the rest of your life. Now we are sending 15–20 good, little soldiers out into the world.

How did you first become involved in pro bono work?

I’ve always done some pro bono work, but I was definitely impressed by the annual pro bono seminar. Serving on the State Bar Board of Directors, and working under the last three presidents — Martha Dickie, Harper Estes, and Roland Johnson — has also had an influence on me. They are so dedicated to helping others, it’s hard to be around them and not want to do more.

The pro bono message is consistent with the values of the Jewish faith, and with the mission of Yavneh Academy. Our Head of School, Don O’Quinn, is very supportive of this work. Mr. O’Quinn and our board of directors view pro bono work as consistent with the community ethic we try to teach our students. Actively working on behalf of indigent



Texans sets a strong example for our students, and especially the future lawyers among them. I am blessed that the school permits me substantial time to pursue these types of cases.

What is the most rewarding part of your pro bono work?

Certainly the thanks you get from pro bono clients is rewarding. But the best part of my recent pro bono cases has been the willingness of some of the best lawyers in Texas — and even the country — to work with me. Without these cases, I would not have the opportunity to work closely with people like Erwin Chemerinsky, Tom Phillips, Ted Cruz, Ike Vanden Eykel, Eliot Shavin, and others. Preparing a petition for review with Chief Justice Phillips was like attending a graduate program in appellate advocacy.

Do you have any advice for young lawyers who want to become involved in pro bono work?

Handling pro bono cases has tangible benefits — your practice really will benefit. And don’t be afraid to bite off a little more than you can chew; more experienced lawyers will help you if they know you are doing something pro bono. ✪

For more information about Access to Justice, visit www.texasbar.com and click on “Pro Bono.”