

Leigh Brissenden and Matthew Hartzler Recognized as NIJC 'Rising Stars'

May 8, 2024

The National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) is celebrating Associates Leigh Brissenden and Matt Hartzler as 2024 Rising Stars, which recognizes attorneys who have demonstrated "extraordinary commitment to ensuring access to justice for immigrants."

Leigh, Financial Markets Litigation Enforcement, has worked with NIJC to represent individuals in their U visa (visa available to victims of certain qualifying criminal activity) and affirmative asylum applications, as well as families in removal proceedings asserting defensive asylum claims, one of which is currently up on appeal with the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA).

"I am privileged to work alongside the brilliant professionals at NIJC; through their passion and expertise, I am continually growing as an advocate for immigrant justice," Leigh said about her pro bono work. "Each of my clients has been remarkably courageous and resilient, and I am honored to be their representative in navigating an often-opaque immigration system."

Matt, Intellectual Property, has represented nine asylum-seeking Hondurans across three different families in removal proceedings in Chicago as well as before the Board of Immigration Appeals. He also drafted asylum applications at an NIJC clinic designed for those who hastily fled Afghanistan after Kabul fell to the Taliban. During a pilot program to assist with the migrant crisis in Chicago, Matt prepared applications on behalf of Venezuelan families for employment authorization and social security cards.

"To me, immigration law is a series of maddening contradictions, bizarre hoops to jump through and frustratingly high stakes," Matt said about his pro bono work. "For those of us representing asylum seekers, we brawl against this administrative lunacy to honor our clients' struggle in seeking better lives here. Only through NIJC's unwavering guidance has this work been possible for me, and I am grateful for my small role in advancing the organization's greater mission."

Leigh and Matt were among 10 attorneys honored out of over 2,000 volunteers that NIJC works with each year. They will be honored on June 4 during the NIJC's 25th Annual Human Rights Awards in Chicago.

CONTACTS

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