



Jonathan Baum Spotlights in University of Chicago Law School's Alumni News Series

December 12, 2024

Senior Counsel and Director of Pro Bono Services Jonathan Baum was featured in The University of Chicago Law School's News series showcasing alumni and their work. In the article "Jonathan Baum, '82: Champion of Pro Bono Reflects on His Public Service Commitment," he discusses the sense of social responsibility instilled in him during his upbringing and how it has shaped his career ever since.

Several years after graduating from the University of Chicago Law School, Jonathan sought a unique career combining billable work with a significant pro bono practice. After working in various legal roles, he approached Chicago law firms with an offer: to work on billable tasks two-thirds of the time while dedicating the remaining third to pro bono work and adjusting his pay accordingly. "I grew up in a home where the Jewish social justice obligation of *tikkun olam* – the repair of the world – was strongly instilled in us," Jonathan said. "For a lawyer, pro bono work offers the opportunity to fulfill that obligation."

In the mid-1990s, Jonathan learned that Katten was considering enhancing its pro bono program by creating a full-time pro bono position. He developed and pitched a proposal for the role, which the firm accepted, hiring him to fill the newly created position. "It was a very bold step for Katten," Jonathan recalled. "Today there are about 150 firms with a full-time, attorney-led pro bono operation, but back then there were no more than five."

Under Jonathan's direction for more than 30 years, Katten's Pro Bono Services program collaborates with more than 70 organizations to identify and pursue pro bono opportunities for the firm's attorneys. Jonathan also personally represents clients, including asylum seekers and individuals facing racial discrimination. In 2022, Jonathan was honored with the Champion of Justice award by the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights in recognition of his long-time dedication to pro bono.

Jonathan is particularly proud of the Katten Legal Clinic, operated with Legal Aid Chicago at the Jose de Diego Community Academy in Humboldt Park. Now in its 11th year, the clinic — the first within a Chicago public school — has assisted more than 1,200 low-income individuals with various civil

issues and received the American Bar Association's Pro Bono Publico Award for its innovative approach to providing legal services. "It's great for the clients, and the attorneys love it," Jonathan said. He is pleased that several other Chicago law firms have followed Katten's model by establishing community-based clinics in cooperation with Legal Aid Chicago.

["Jonathan Baum, '82: Champion of Pro Bono Reflects on His Public Service Commitment,"](#) The University of Chicago Law School Alumni News, December 11, 2024

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