

# Cozen O'Connor Attorneys Secure Early Release for Pro Bono Client

**Wednesday, March 29, 2023**

**NEW YORK, March 29, 2023** – Cozen O'Connor attorneys, Matthew Elkin, Emily Shoor, and Maria Ermakova, in coordination with the nonprofit Sanctuary for Families, have secured the release of their client under New York's landmark Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA). The 2019 law allows domestic violence survivors who have been convicted of felonies to apply for reduced sentences that take into account the context of their abuse. Their client, Michelle Spirles, is a survivor of severe domestic abuse. She was convicted in 2011 of manslaughter after stabbing her abuser during an incident of domestic violence. Her release under the DVSJA is one of fewer than 30 of its kind to date.

On March 23, the Cozen O'Connor team secured Spirles' release from Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women with a reduced sentence equivalent to time served. The next day, Spirles walked out of prison after serving nearly 12 years. Elkin and Shoor persuaded the Monroe County District Attorney's Office to join in Spirles' re-sentencing application and moved the Supreme Court to apply the DVSJA to reduce her 25-year sentence by 15 years. As a result, Spirles has finally returned home to her six children and 12 grandchildren.

Elkin said of the victory, "Representing a survivor like Michelle has been a highlight of my career. The hope and strength she brought to our work in the face of tragic circumstances have been an inspiration." Shoor added, "Meeting with Michelle after her release was an emotional experience. To have such a profound influence on her life has been an honor. I look forward to watching her utilize her experiences to inspire other survivors and encourage them to find their voices as she did."

Cozen O'Connor partnered with Sanctuary for Families, a New York City-based nonprofit dedicated to aiding victims of domestic violence and their children, in representing Spirles. Ross Kramer, the director of Sanctuary's Incarcerated Gender Violence Survivor Initiative, shared, "It was a privilege working with Michelle and the Cozen O'Connor team. Michelle deeply deserved the opportunity to rejoin her family and community and worked tirelessly to achieve that result. It isn't every day that we can quantify a legal success, but in this case, the Cozen O'Connor team gave Michelle and her family more than a decade together that they wouldn't have otherwise had. We are tremendously grateful for Matt and Emily's patience, compassion, and legal excellence."

In addition to making up for lost time as a doting grandmother, Spirles plans to work with Sanctuary to advocate for other survivors of domestic violence.



*(Elkin, Spirles, and Shoor after Spirles' release)*

## About Pro Bono at Cozen O'Connor

Access to legal counsel is a fundamental right of every citizen in a democratic society. Cozen O'Connor is committed to helping ensure that universal access is a reality. Since our founding in 1970, we have dedicated tens of thousands of attorney hours to pro bono representation of indigent individuals and charitable institutions. The firm is also a signatory to the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge of the Pro Bono Institute and strives to provide 3% of billable hours to pro bono clients every year. Over the last five years, Cozen O'Connor has climbed 48 places on *The American Lawyer's* annual pro bono ranking of the nation's largest law firms, most recently ranking 67th on the list of 200 firms. For more information about our pro bono work, please contact director of Pro Bono Engagement, Melinda Levine de Lisle.