

Cozen O'Connor Honored With 2008 National Law Journal Pro Bono Award

Thursday, January 10, 2008

Cozen O'Connor has been honored with a 2008 Pro Bono Award from *The National Law Journal* (NLJ). Each year, the NLJ recognizes the lawyers and law firms that have worked to ensure that legal rights are not contingent on an individual's ability to pay for an attorney. The award committee looks for the firms and individuals who made the biggest commitments, both in time and in money, on behalf of pro bono clients. Cozen O'Connor was recognized for the firm's work as lead private counsel in the Hazleton, Pa., immigration case that captured national attention last year.

The landmark case, *Lozano et. al v. City of Hazleton*, was brought on behalf of Hazleton residents, landlords and business owners. The Cozen O'Connor team worked in conjunction with the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, the ACLU, the Community Justice Project and other local lawyers in this highly publicized case attacking the constitutionality of Hazleton's Illegal Immigration Relief Act and related anti-immigration ordinances. The challenged ordinances were first enacted in July 2006, after the mayor of Hazleton began blaming many of the city's ills, including crime, economic burdens and social dilemmas, on undocumented immigrants. The ordinances were the first local laws in the country to impose fines on landlords who rent to undocumented immigrants and to deny or revoke business permits for companies that employ them. The ordinances failed to provide immigrants any meaningful opportunity to challenge their eviction or loss of employment based on the city's action. The plaintiffs charged that the ordinances infringed were in conflict with federal immigration law and policy, failed to provide procedural protections, and also conflicted with state laws. Following a two week trial in March 2007, Judge James M. Munley of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania issued a 206-page opinion permanently enjoining the enforcement of the Hazleton Illegal Immigration Relief Act. The decision is now on appeal. The Cozen O'Connor team was led by Thomas G. Wilkinson.

"We had the opportunity to litigate a series of nationally important issues that had never really played out in a courtroom in this country before," said Wilkinson, leader of the firm's trial team on this case. "The court's opinion was a watershed decision that explained in a compelling fashion why immigrants should have the legal standing to press these fundamental rights in the federal courts and why immigration policy and enforcement is best made and implemented at the federal level."

"Cozen O'Connor is dedicated to pro bono work, and we think it is the right of all people to have a voice in the legal system," said Thomas A. Decker, President & CEO of Cozen O'Connor. "We are proud of the work our attorneys did in this case and in every case they work on for the less fortunate in our community."

Cozen O'Connor is a signatory to the Pro Bono Institute's Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge, and encourages all of its attorneys to devote at least 60 hours of pro bono work annually. Each attorney's time value in handling pro bono matters is treated as full production credit for up to 50 hours annually. Firm attorneys volunteer their time and expertise in diverse matters, including working as advocates for children, the elderly, the indigent, and the disadvantaged, as well as serving as legal advisors for non-profit corporations, staffing legal aid clinics and acting as counsel for marginalized groups.