

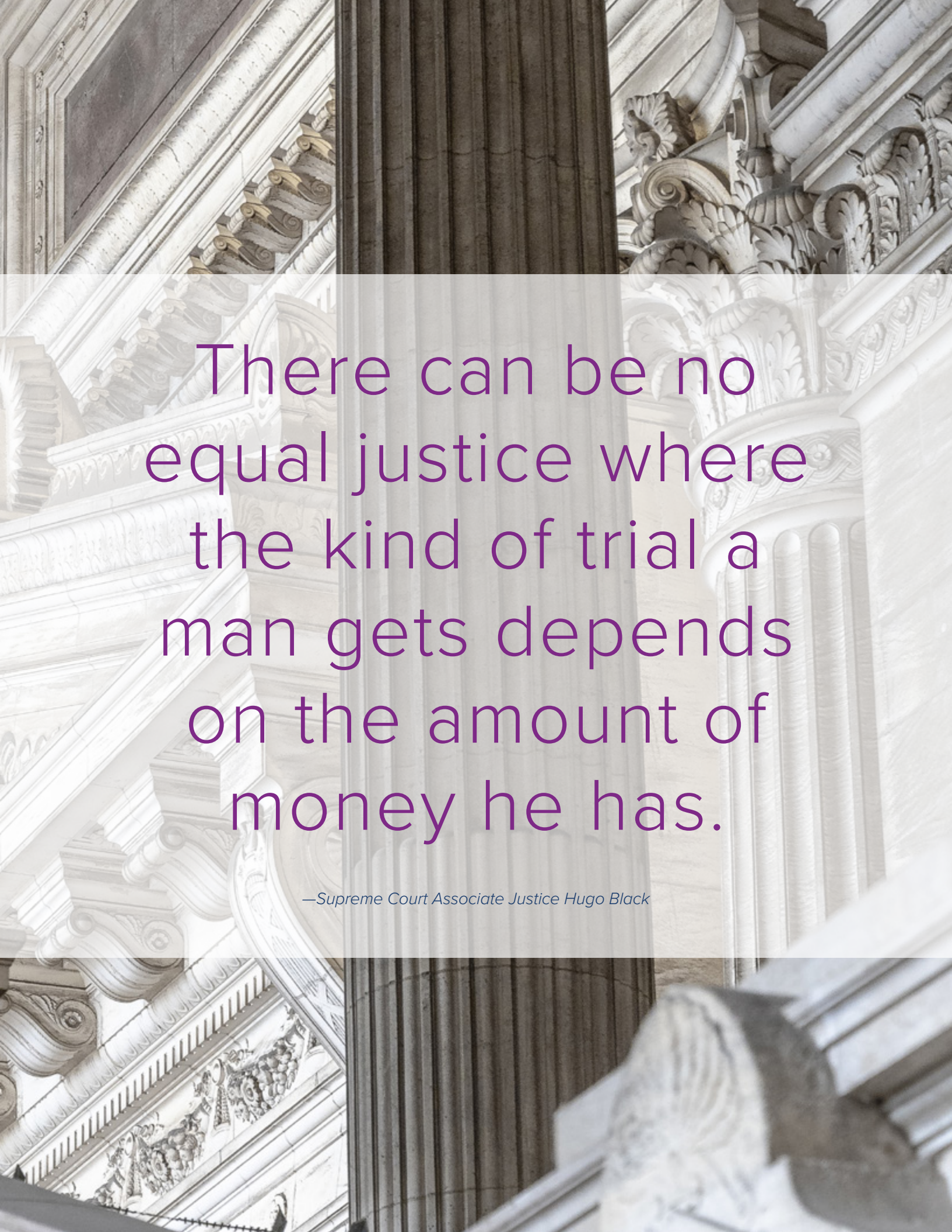


PRO BONO MATTERS

2023 Highlights

Dykema





There can be no
equal justice where
the kind of trial a
man gets depends
on the amount of
money he has.

—Supreme Court Associate Justice Hugo Black



Table of Contents

PRO BONO AT DYKEMA	6
OUR PRO BONO COMMITTEE MEMBERS	7
AFGHANI FAMILY ASYLUM: JUSTICE HAS NO BORDERS	8
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CENTER: ON THE PATH OF PROGRESS	9
HOMES FOR GENERATIONS: HOMEGROWN, HOME OWNED	10
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY: PRESERVING NATURE'S LEGACY	12
NAME CHANGE CLINIC: WHAT'S IN A NAME?	14
SALSA: LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD	15
ADVOCATES OF OZAUKEE: ON THE ROAD AGAIN	16
EXPUNGEMENT WORK: REWRITING THE NARRATIVE	18



Pro Bono at Dykema

In its 2022 report [The Justice Gap](#), the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) estimated that 1 in 2 low-income Americans is denied an attorney's help for basic legal needs, including eviction, child custody, and protection from abuse. This is because LSC-funded organizations simply do not have enough resources to meet the current demand for civil legal aid. The difference between the need for services and the resources available to meet that need is commonly referred to as the "justice gap." In partnership with our legal aid colleagues, Dykema has risen to help close this gap in large and small ways. In this report, you'll read about some of those efforts of which we are particularly proud. We believe every lawyer, regardless of workload or professional prominence, has the ability to offer a hand to a community member in need. If you would like to learn more about our pro bono efforts or would like to join us in doing this important work, please reach out to me directly.

Warmly,

Heidi Naasko

Member and Pro Bono Counsel

Our Pro Bono Committee Members

Dykema takes its commitment to being outstanding citizens seriously. As a firm and in partnership with our legal aid colleagues, through our pro bono practice we help solve some of our community's most complex legal problems, making it a more just place to live.



Heidi Naasko
Co-Chair, Member



David Kinder
Co-Chair, Member



Tamara Bush
Member



Melanie Fry
Member



Bruce Goldsmith
Senior Counsel



David Graham
Senior Counsel



Andrew Green
Member



Eric Klein
Member



Robin Lehninger
Senior Counsel



Krista Lenart
Member



Mark Magyar
Member



Cliff Riley
Member



Dante Stella
Member



Alan Wilk
Member



Steven Zeller
Member



Joanne Zimolzak
Member

AFGHANI FAMILY ASYLUM

Justice Has No Borders

The first time our client, Dan (not his actual name), defied the odds, he provided his son with an education that prioritized democratic values—while growing up in Afghanistan. Dan owned a construction company, which was hired by allied forces to build security facilities around U.S. military bases and build schools that girls could attend alongside boys. Unfortunately, the Taliban, aware of his work for the allied forces, threatened, extorted, and kidnapped his family and employees. When American forces withdrew in August 2021, Dan and his family also needed to leave.

In the chaotic aftermath of the collapse of Afghanistan's democratic government, our client and his two sons—then just 17 and 3 years old—came to the United States but were forced to leave the rest of their family behind, where they went into hiding and were left stranded in a country ruled by fear. Dan and his two sons were resettled in southeastern Michigan.

Shortly after they arrived, Dykema partnered with the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center and agreed to take their case. Bridget Underhill, Heidi Naasko, Lauren Quigley, and Drew Van de Grift filed an asylum application for each of the family members. The application required an interview in Chicago, which has the closest office that conducts asylum interviews for Michigan residents. That's when Brett Natarelli stepped in from Chicago. Together, the Dykema team skillfully presented the family's story, highlighting the immense dangers they face, and the urgent need for protection. Their efforts resulted in a historic achievement—the first statewide asylum grant received.

This same team is now preparing the applications to reunite the remaining family members, with the hope that they will come to the United States shortly. In the case of this courageous family, the pro bono efforts of our attorneys not only provided them with a chance for a brighter future but also offered hope for their loved ones who remain in Afghanistan.



Bridget Underhill
Associate



Heidi Naasko
Member



Brett Natarelli
Member



Lauren Quigley
Senior Counsel



Drew Van de Grift
Senior Attorney



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CENTER

On the Path of Progress

Our long-standing and ongoing alliance with a Metro Detroit domestic violence and sexual assault treatment center directly reflects this belief. This organization's mission to eradicate domestic violence and sexual crimes and to create a safe and nurturing environment for survivors and their families has driven tangible change in Metro Detroit for a number of years.

When the organization began its search for a new location in Metro Detroit to expand its efforts and the geographic distribution of its support operations for survivors and their families, it was only logical that the organization turned to Dykema for guidance. Initially, the organization's executive director contacted Dykema's Giuliano Mancini to provide general input and advice on what typically goes into a lease agreement, what tenants should look for and request from a landlord, and the risks and problems that tenants tend to encounter when negotiating a lease and commencing a landlord-tenant relationship. However, as the conversation evolved, Giuliano saw an opportunity to become more hands-on, playing multiple roles of broker, consultant, and eventually contract negotiator and scrivener for the proposed transaction. After guiding the organization through a tedious letter-of-intent negotiation to identify the organization's goals for its new space, he later assisted with the lease agreement drafting process to incorporate language to accomplish those goals. It is Giuliano's sincere hope that at this organization's additional location, the organization will be able to be a beacon of hope and support for a larger portion of the community and to initiate further beneficial change in Metro Detroit.



**Giuliano
Mancini**
Associate

HOMES FOR GENERATIONS

Homegrown, Home Owned

The Homes for Generations program assists low-income families by providing legal assistance to reach a goal of retaining homes occupied by heirs of long-deceased homeowners; those homes might otherwise be lost to tax foreclosure or unclear titles. In so doing, it tackles the long-lasting effects of redlining, deed restrictions, and other discriminatory practices that have disproportionately impacted communities of color. This partnership seeks to prevent the loss of home and land ownership by offering targeted assistance to families living in homes inherited or purchased informally during times of segregation and discriminatory lending.

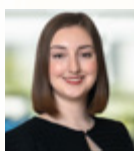
When four Ann Arbor area families were facing foreclosure, Dykema attorneys Rob Tiplady and Hannah Muller collaborated with the county treasurer and the probate court to help clear titles, establish ownership, and pay the taxes in order to ultimately keep the house within the family, securing both housing and generational wealth provided by homeownership. Their efforts have not only stabilized housing options but also fostered a sense of pride and security for families that may be experiencing the confidence of clear titled homeownership for the first time.

To date, in collaboration with Dykema and other legal partners, the Homes for Generations program has transferred over \$1.3 million in wealth to low-income families. This achievement has not only established a foundation of economic stability but also contributed to breaking the cycle of generational wealth inequality.

Underscoring his commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of individuals and families, Tiplady received the prestigious Washtenaw County Bar Association's 10th Annual Darrow-Harris Award for Public Service/Pro Bono work.



**Robert
Tiplady**
Member



**Hannah
Muller**
Associate





THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Preserving Nature's Legacy

As environmental challenges loom large and the need for conservation has never been more urgent, The Nature Conservancy takes a stance as a global leader. Dykema is proud to stand there with them with our ongoing pro bono initiatives to preserve our country's natural heritage.

Since 2017, our attorneys have provided invaluable counsel on a wide range of environmental topics, including conservation easements, deed restrictions, permits, and land purchases in northern Michigan. But it wasn't until years later that our partnership went south—to Texas, that is.

As a transactional attorney who typically works on mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures for his corporate clients, Will Liebmann of Dykema's San Antonio office never believed that his team was equipped to tackle a pro bono case. But in the spring of 2023, a chance encounter with Lizzie Brooden-Kuo of The Nature Conservancy revealed an opportunity that directly aligned with their skill sets.

After Brooden-Kuo connected them with her colleagues in San Antonio, what began as a research project quickly evolved into the creation of regulatory guidelines that could impact the way the conservancy conducts business moving forward. As one of the largest landowners in Texas, The Nature Conservancy is deeply invested in carbon capture technology and ownership rights. Liebmann, together with members Andrew Sherwood and Megan Knell and summer associates Ryan Cox and Harry Merz, launched a multi-state project that aimed to accurately measure the conservancy's underground carbon storage and in turn help define their strategy.

Following the success of this initiative, our partnership continues to build momentum, with projects launching across other practice areas as of September 2023. While we can't tell you what's next for The Nature Conservancy, we can tell you that Dykema will be standing with them.



Wilhelm Liebmann
Member



Andrew Sherwood
Member



Megan Knell
Member

NAME CHANGE CLINIC

What's in a Name?

For members of the transgender community, obtaining a legal name change is a critical component of gender-affirming care. This is because having identity documents that accurately reflect the essential aspect of one's personhood, one's gender. Lawyers who are willing to navigate this process can provide helpful guidance in an often confusing and multistep process. In Metro Detroit, Dykema didn't just play a role in this chapter—we wrote it.

In 2017, Dykema partnered with the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund to create a manual for attorneys to assist low-income transgender people with changing their name. In Michigan, changing one's name requires navigating an arduous and costly legal process that can act as a barrier to individuals looking to go through it. "Typically, these take several months to process because you have to do a background check, a legal publication, get your fingerprints done, and pay filing fees," says Dykema Pro Bono leader Heidi Naasko. Without legal assistance, the process can be even more cumbersome. So Dykema's team of Nazneen Hasan, Christyn Scott, Kris Lenart, and many others set out to help.

Then, in 2019, through a partnership with Ford and together with the Fair Michigan Foundation, the ACLU of Michigan, and the Ruth Ellis Center, Dykema established a one-day clinic for local transgender individuals to meet with an attorney and prepare all the documents necessary to start the name change process. One particularly difficult step in the existing process was overcoming the financial burden of fees for services including transportation, filing, fingerprinting and publication. Because access to justice means not being excluded from the justice system for lack of funds, Dykema sought fee waivers for those who qualified and paid the filing fees for clients who did not qualify for them.

The other part of the equation meant overhauling the process on an institutional level. Realizing this opportunity, our attorneys successfully lobbied for systematic Michigan Rules of Court and statewide legal forms to simplify the name change process.

Since the program's inception in 2019, our ongoing series of one-day clinics has provided critical legal assistance and empowered participants to navigate the process with confidence. To date, Dykema has completed more than 300 name changes as an essential part of the gender-confirmation process—all at no cost to our clients.



**Nazneen
Hasan**
Member



**Christyn
Scott**
Member



**Kris
Lenart**
Member

SAN ANTONIO LEGAL SERVICES ASSOCIATION

Leveling the Playing Field

In collaboration with San Antonio Legal Services Association (SALSA), Dykema provides free civil legal services to individuals and families across the San Antonio area facing financial constraints or vulnerability by participating in several clinics, including the Wills Clinic, Veterans Legal Advice Clinic, and the Alternatives to Guardianship Clinic.

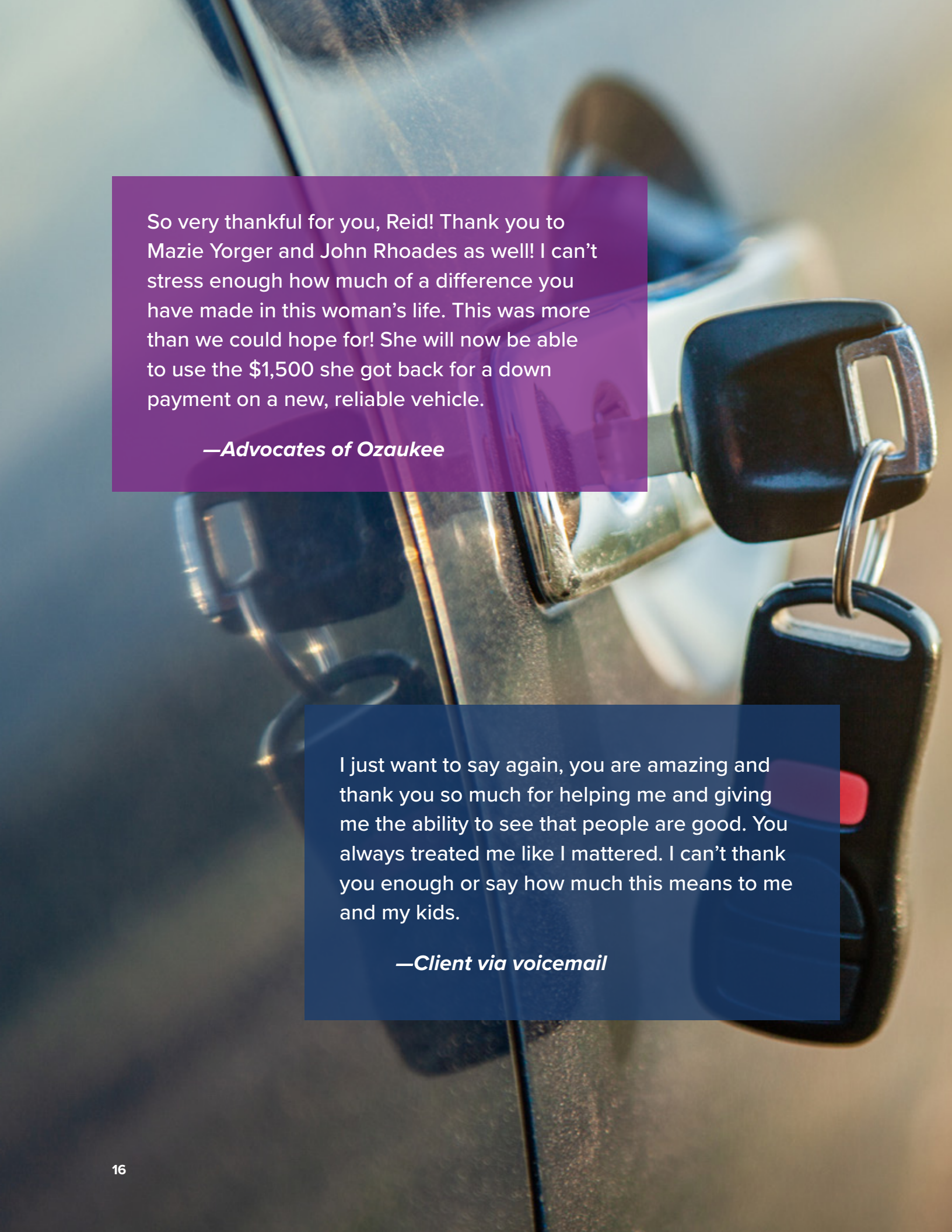
Senior Attorney Danielle Rushing Behrends was introduced to SALSA while a law student, and she began serving on its board of directors in 2022.

Several associates have personally volunteered at the SALSA Eviction Appeal Clinic. This is what Ryan Landry says about his experience.

“Clients who come to the SALSA eviction clinic for help are facing immediate housing instability and often do not know where to turn. As a volunteer, you can help guide them in the next steps of the eviction process or their appeal options. I really enjoyed being able to give back to my community at the eviction clinic, and I encourage anyone who is interested in making a tangible impact on your community to get involved.”



Danielle Rushing Behrends
Senior Attorney

A close-up photograph of a car door handle, likely made of chrome or polished metal, with a black plastic key fob and a set of keys hanging from it. The background is softly blurred, showing the side of a car and a person's hand near the handle. The lighting is warm, suggesting an outdoor setting during the day.

So very thankful for you, Reid! Thank you to Mazie Yorger and John Rhoades as well! I can't stress enough how much of a difference you have made in this woman's life. This was more than we could hope for! She will now be able to use the \$1,500 she got back for a down payment on a new, reliable vehicle.

—Advocates of Ozaukee

I just want to say again, you are amazing and thank you so much for helping me and giving me the ability to see that people are good. You always treated me like I mattered. I can't thank you enough or say how much this means to me and my kids.

—Client via voicemail

ADVOCATES OF OZAUKEE

On the Road Again

When a resident of Advocates of Ozaukee, a local women's shelter in Saukville, Wisconsin, needed to resolve a dispute over a used automotive purchase, they called on Dykema to assist. A single mom who'd experienced significant hardships, the resident had issues that arose ironically, when she was offered a job promotion.

This new position required her to have dependable, highway-capable transportation; unfortunately, the car she purchased had numerous and significant mechanical, dependability, and safety issues that the dealer failed to disclose and even attempted to hide. To make matters worse, the dealer performed two separate bait-and-switch moves with two vehicles, ultimately upselling the client on a car they promised to finance—at 28% interest, which was hidden from our client.

Advocates of Ozaukee then contacted Dykema through their connection with Kate Bechen, Managing Member of the firm's Milwaukee office. Reid Hazelton, the office "gearhead," also jumped at the chance to assist. Heidi Naasko helped assemble a team with Member John Rhoades (Detroit) and Legal Assistant Mazie Yorger (Milwaukee).

Reid inspected the vehicle visually and with an OBDII scanner and saw that the vehicle was significantly unsafe and not worth repairing. The vehicle had significant emission system, suspension, brake, body, and engine issues. Reid presented these facts to the dealer, who denied there were any issues with the car. After numerous bad-faith renegotiations, false promises, and unreasonable demands from the dealer and their attorney, Reid contacted the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) field inspector in Milwaukee and used their leverage to pressure the dealer to repurchase the vehicle. After it became clear the negotiations were simply the dealer's stalling tactic, the dealer was given a take-it-or-leave-it offer—buy back the car in full; refund the purchase price, guaranteed auto protection insurance coverage, extended warranty, down payment, and mileage deduction (\$900 to our client); and \$1,500 in pain and suffering. The offer total was more than \$15,000, which the dealer ultimately accepted.

Relative to Dykema's other work, this \$1,500 net gain for the client may seem like a small win, but it had a significant and meaningful benefit. The settlement quickly resolved the dispute and put an end to a highly stressful three-month ordeal for the client. It removed the predatory loan terms from her credit, allowed her to progress with her career, and put \$1,500 in her pocket to go toward a more dependable vehicle.

After the settlement, Reid continued to work with the client through the following weekend to help her find a dependable car that was safe for her family and avoid onerous loan terms. Reid continues to work with the Wisconsin DOT to investigate the dealer to ensure that the dealer doesn't harm future buyers.



**Kate
Bechen**
Member



**Reid
Hazelton**
Member



**John
Rhoades**
Member

EXPUNGEMENT WORK

Rewriting the Narrative

The American Bar Association estimates that criminal convictions have thousands of unintended consequences that extend beyond the fines, probation, or incarceration faced by criminal defendants. A criminal expungement (or sealing records) ends unintended consequences of convictions by providing offenders with a path to demonstrate to their sentencing judge that they are indeed worthy of a second chance. Dykema attorneys have worked to seal or expunge records for over 10 years. In Chicago, Dykema teamed with attorneys from Kraft Heinz and Legal Aid Chicago to prepare applications for criminal record sealing for low-income individuals.

Recognizing that Black and Brown people are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system and that more than 50% of people seeking criminal record sealing are declined due to a lack of the assistance of an attorney, this one-day clinic was born of an effort of the Chicago Awareness Group as a tangible response to both close the justice gap and address systemic racism experienced by this community.

In Detroit, Dykema lawyers have spent more than a decade representing low-income individuals with criminal records seeking a criminal record expungement. Earlier this year, in partnership with Health Alliance Plan, Henry Ford Health, and Lakeshore Legal Aid, Dykema helped organize an expungement fair for individuals with convictions in Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb counties. This joint effort aimed to complete expungement applications and counsel participants to set aside and expunge more than 30 convictions.

Together, we completed 15 expungement applications during the clinic and committed to providing direct representation to additional clients. This collaborative effort offered community members a fresh start and removed barriers to volunteering, employment, housing, education, and other life opportunities.





California | Illinois | Michigan | Minnesota | Texas | Washington, D.C. | Wisconsin

www.dykema.com

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