

FORMAN WATKINS REFLECTS ON PRO BONO SERVICE

Forman Watkins is committed to serving our communities through pro bono work and civic engagement. That's why, in the last two years alone, dozens of attorneys and staff have spent thousands of hours engaging in the issues that matter to them and their communities, from arguing matters at the Fifth Circuit to representing children at hearings in juvenile court. On behalf of pro bono clients, our team has conducted trials, drafted appeals, filed petitions, influenced policies, and launched legal clinics. We have deepened our partnerships with the organizations doing important pro bono work.

This engagement and partnership provides members of our communities with legal services when they need them most, and provides our attorneys and staff invaluable learning and service opportunities. Here are just a few of these stories.

AFTER SUCCESSFUL APPEAL, FORMAN WATKINS LAWYERS FINISHING FIGHT FOR FAMILY'S IMMIGRATION STATUS

For the past four years, Forman Watkins New Orleans attorneys have been working on behalf of a family of sisters to ensure their safe and legal status in the United States. The representation of these three sisters began in early 2017, when Tim Gray and Michelle Roy accepted representation of the sisters through Catholic Charities' Pro Bono and Juveniles program. For the oldest two sisters, Tim and Michelle applied for asylum. Both sisters prevailed in their claims and they have now received their green cards establishing their permanent legal resident status in the United States.

However, the youngest sister, just ten years old when representation began, did not have resolution on any of her claims. The team advocated for the youngest sister to receive an immigration status designed for minors, called Special Immigrant Juvenile status (SIJ). SIJ requires an extensive application process, including both an order from a State Court Judge, finding that certain predicate facts have been met, and a second determination by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that the child is otherwise eligible for SIJ status.

After successfully obtaining the predicate state court order, USCIS denied the client's application for SIJ status. Margaret McLaughlin and Michelle Roy submitted briefing to appeal that decision to the Administrative Appeals Office at USCIS. The team recently learned that the [APPEAL WAS SUCCESSFUL](#), overturning the denial, and [GRANTING THE YOUNGEST SISTER SIJ STATUS](#). As the next and final step, new associate Jordan Nixon has prepared and filed an application for permanent status on our client's behalf, which we expect to be granted. Once granted, all three sisters will finally have permanent legal resident status in the United States.

After a long journey in immigration court, the clients are thrilled to have resolution for their family, and the Forman Watkins team plans to put these learning experiences to work on behalf of future clients.

DEDICATED TEAM MEMBERS



Tim Gray



Michelle Roy



Margaret McLaughlin



Jordan Nixon



FWK IN EDUCATION

FWK CELEBRATES ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF LAUNCH OF EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP WITH MC LAW

Late last year, FormanWatkins partnered with Mississippi College School of Law to become the sponsor of MC Law's Education Law & Policy Clinic. Our attorneys work with MC Law students to represent public school students in school disciplinary, youth court, and special education matters throughout the state of Mississippi.



Julian Miller

FWK Attorney Julian Miller leads the charge as the firm liaison to the clinic. Julian Miller is a rising star in the field, with a hefty list of important litigation involvement complementing his extensive civic engagement. As the lead attorney for the MC law education clinic, he coordinates FWK attorneys and a team of student attorneys in advocating on behalf of clients across the state in matters ranging from individual cases to policy advocacy work.

In its first year of partnership, FWK attorneys have worked **OVER 500** pro bono hours on clinic matters **ON BEHALF OF 14 CLIENTS**, and look forward to many more productive years to come.

MY TIME IN THE EDUCATION LAW AND POLICY CLINIC WAS ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL EXPERIENCES THAT I HAVE HAD WHILE AT MC LAW. THE CLINIC ALLOWED ME TO GAIN EXPERIENCE ADVOCATING FOR THE YOUTH THROUGHOUT THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI. ATTORNEY MILLER HAS REMARKABLE INSIGHT IN THE MANNER WHICH HE FRAMES AND CONTEXTUALIZES THE LEGAL ISSUES PROBING EDUCATION IN THE STATE. I AM TRULY THANKFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY THAT I WAS GIVEN TO LEARN ABOUT EDUCATION LAW AND POLICY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PRO BONO REPRESENTATION FROM ATTORNEY MILLER.

Antoine J. Lockhart, Mississippi College School of Law, class of 2021

LEGAL PROTECTIONS ENFORCED FOR A KINDERGARTEN STUDENT – AND ALL SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN HIS DISTRICT

Five-year-old "M.H." was having problems in school, and his parents and teachers were trying to understand his special needs. They recognized he needed extra help with language and speech and had an individualized education plan (IEP) in place for those needs. But those measures were insufficient, and after re-evaluating M.H., the school preliminarily suggested he may have ADHD. M.H.'s parents sought help from a psychologist, who believed M.H. may also be autistic.

As the adults were working out the proper diagnoses and accommodations for M.H., he had an incident on the playground, where he punched another student after being provoked. Despite M.H.'s special needs, and without following the proper procedures to provide due process, the principal recommended a 45-day placement in alternative school, and the school board affirmed the punishment.

That is when Julian and his team got involved. They filed a Due Process Complaint with the school district, as well as a federal court action challenging the violation of Marvin's constitutional and state disciplinary due process rights. **THE FWK TEAM WAS SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING THE SCHOOL DISTRICT TO PLACE M.H. BACK IN HIS REGULAR SCHOOL SETTING, PROVIDE THE CORRECT ELIGIBILITY DIAGNOSIS AND COMMENSURATE SERVICES, AND CHANGE THEIR POLICY TO ALIGN WITH STATE AND FEDERAL LAW REQUIRING PROPER DISCIPLINARY DUE PROCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS IN THE DISTRICT.**

AUTISTIC STUDENT RECEIVES SETTLEMENT FOR SORELY NEEDED SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

"L.J." is a six-year-old diagnosed with autism, as well as several physical ailments that required him to be educated from home. Yet despite his autism diagnosis, which his mother communicated to the school, L.J.'s IEP did not include that designation, and his school failed to make proper accommodations. Instead of the behavior therapy, sensory integration, assistive technology device sessions, language therapy, special academic instruction, and other services that L.J. should have received, he was only allowed limited speech services.

Faced with the pressing need to have her son's needs met and keep him from slipping further behind, L.J.'s mother moved him out of state, to a school district where he would receive the services he was entitled to under the law. However, L.J. needed remedial autism services to make up for the deficits prior to the move, and his mother sought compensation from the Mississippi school district, to contribute to the private services he would need.

The FWK team drafted and filed a due process complaint based on the plain violations of L.J.'s rights under the law. **THE MATTER SETTLED, AND L.J.'S MOTHER RECEIVED PAYMENT FROM THE SCHOOL DISTRICT TO HELP L.J. RECEIVE THE SERVICES HE NEEDS TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME AND PUT HIM BACK ON THE RIGHT TRACK.**