

Seth Orkand

Seth Orkand is nothing short of a pro bono dynamo. Since Mr. Orkand joined WilmerHale in 2007, he has contributed nearly 4,000 pro bono hours on more than eighty matters. At the same time, he has built a successful practice focusing on complex commercial disputes and investigations.

We could honor him, as the Lawyers Clearinghouse did in 2009, for his pro bono work with Boston's homeless population, coordinating WilmerHale's free legal clinics at Boston area homeless shelters. But today, we are pleased to honor him for his pro bono work in publishing a first-of-its-kind practitioners' guide for representing victims of human trafficking in Massachusetts. Through this project, Mr. Orkand has gone beyond representing the needs of individual clients; he has created a resource that will increase greatly the number of attorneys who have the knowledge and skills needed to represent an underserved and exceptionally vulnerable population of victims.

Human trafficking, which has been described as a form of modern-day slavery, is a substantial problem worldwide. It is estimated that 21 million people, most of them women and young girls, are victims of commercial sexual exploitation, debt bondage, and forced labor. Incidents of sex trafficking and labor trafficking also occur in the Commonwealth, but the legal tools needed to respond to these crimes only came into existence in 2012, when Massachusetts passed one of the nation's toughest anti-trafficking laws. At that time, Lutheran Social Services asked Attorney Orkand to oversee a project that would educate the bar about the special needs of human trafficking victims, and about the new tools the Legislature had created to assist them. Mr. Orkand immediately stepped up to the challenge.

The attorneys' guide that Mr. Orkand edited and published online last December -- entitled Representing Victims of Human Trafficking in Massachusetts -- was the culmination of an extensive and challenging

process. Mr. Orkand worked tirelessly to lead a team of WilmerHale attorneys who researched and wrote the guide, and he managed his firm's efforts with input from other nonprofit and governmental stakeholders in human trafficking issues. Mr. Orkand was not deterred by the complexity of the legal issues confronted by human trafficking victims, whose needs include criminal defense and immigration assistance as well as housing, employment, and public welfare advocacy. Nor was he deterred by the fact that the Massachusetts anti-trafficking statute was so new, meaning that many of the legal arguments relating to human trafficking had never before been tested in Massachusetts.

The wisdom, experience, and insight that Mr. Orkand brought to bear on this project are evident from the contents of the guide itself. Rather than simply setting out to produce a compendium of statutes and case law, Mr. Orkand envisioned a guide that would address the practical problems confronted by attorneys who work with human trafficking victims. Thus, the

guide contains advice on the warning signs that indicate that a client might be a human trafficking victim who is reluctant to speak up about his or her victimization. It discusses how to build a relationship of trust with victims, as well as the challenges of working with child victims. It highlights the importance of attending to the non-legal needs of victims. And it provides extensive information about the legal environment pertaining to human trafficking, including the 2012 Massachusetts anti-trafficking statute, which creates new human trafficking crimes, a new affirmative defense for victims who are arrested and prosecuted for prostitution, and new civil remedies that permit victims to seek their own private recourse against traffickers. For these reasons, the guide that Mr. Orkand and his team worked so hard to create has been praised as "a model for other states and an invaluable resource for attorneys representing human trafficking victims."

In the time since the guide was published last year, Mr. Orkand has continued to dedicate himself to educating the bar about ways to implement initiatives for human trafficking victims by serving on the Boston Bar Association's Human Trafficking Task Force, which is holding its first educational seminar this month. Through such work, Mr. Orkand is making a substantial contribution to the Commonwealth's effort to become a national leader in the fight against human trafficking.

Mr. Orkand has said that his commercial litigation work is intellectually rewarding, but he relies on his pro bono practice to provide work that is rewarding for his soul. Thank you, Seth, for reminding us that the legal profession has the power to bring about profound changes in the lives of those most in need, and for giving other attorneys the tools they need to make use of that power.