



HOLWELL SHUSTER & GOLDBERG SECURES PRO BONO WIN FOR MOTHER AND DOMESTIC ABUSE SURVIVOR IN HAGUE ABDUCTION CONVENTION CASE

09.20.2024

New York – The United States District Court for the Southern District of New York entered a lengthy decision in favor of Holwell Shuster & Goldberg’s client, Kaja Sokola, in a case under the Hague Abduction Convention.

Ms. Sokola had fled Poland for the U.S. to escape her abusive husband, bringing their child with her. The father sought an order to return the child to Poland under the Hague Convention. The case turned on the grave risk of harm to the child if returned to Poland.

Alongside co-counsel Richard Min of Green Kaminer Min & Rockmore LLP, HSG associate Jonathan Schaffer-Goddard has represented Ms. Sokola *pro bono* since January 2023, including at a four-day trial in front of SDNY Judge Katherine Polk Failla in late 2023 and through supplemental post-trial discovery.

In a ruling handed down on September 18, 2024, the court found that there was “incontrovertible evidence of Petitioner’s severe, unrelenting psychological and physical abuse” of Ms. Sokola, “numerous instances” of his abuse of the child, and that the child would be at a grave risk of harm if returned to Poland.

Most notably, after Jonathan Schaffer-Goddard’s cross-examination of the father at trial and further post-trial discovery, Judge Failla found that the “degree and consistency” of the father’s dishonesty with the court was enough to discredit his testimony entirely. The father’s lies included repeated denials under oath of a serious criminal history of which HSG uncovered evidence and presented to the Judge.

“It has been an honor to represent Ms. Sokola in this case alongside Richard Min,” said Jonathan Schaffer-Goddard. “This outcome is a vindication for her after risking everything to escape years of abuse in order to protect her child. It is a testament to HSG’s commitment to pro bono work that I was able to take this case on from start to finish and leave no stone unturned to uncover the truth for our client.”

Kaja Sokola said: “As a woman who was abused by her husband, as a mother who witnessed her husband abuse their child, and as a survivor of domestic violence, I am very thankful to Jonathan Schaffer-Goddard, Richard Min, and the justice system in the US for this result which keeps me and my son safe. I came to New York in January 2022 with two suitcases and a small child. My work, friends, and family were all left behind. Since then I have and will continue to do everything I can to help women and children in situations like mine.”

In addition to Jonathan Schaffer-Goddard, the HSG team that worked on this case included attorneys Kamran Khan, Geoffrey McFarlane, Daniel Madison, Nancy Perry, and Sherrick Watson.