

## Miller Canfield Announces Seryak Award Winners, Recognizing Outstanding Pro Bono Service

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Miller Canfield is pleased to announce the winners of the 2018 Richard J. Seryak Award, in recognition of outstanding pro bono service: David O'Brien and Conor Fitzpatrick. The announcement was made by CEO Michael McGee.

O'Brien, a principal in the firm's Ann Arbor, Michigan, office, has worked tirelessly to help clients who were sentenced as juveniles to mandatory life without parole. After the Supreme Court ruled that such sentences were unconstitutional, O'Brien began work on two complicated resentencing cases. One of his clients, Bosie Smith, had spent over two decades in prison when O'Brien met him in 2013. O'Brien spent hundreds of hours on the case, and today, Smith is a free man who is enrolled in college, works two jobs, and donates his time to a Detroit-based nonprofit that assists young adults who have sustained acute intentional violent trauma.

O'Brien continues to work on behalf of his second client, Kevin Boyd, who was just resentenced this month to a term of years that renders him immediately eligible for parole.

Fitzpatrick represents a client who claims that the Michigan Department of Corrections retaliated against him when, after being elected by fellow inmates to serve as their representative to the facility's Warden's Forum, he drafted and sent a peaceful letter to prison officials complaining about deficient unit conditions. Fitzpatrick prevailed in the district court, the court ruling that the First Amendment protects a prisoner's right to petition prison officials in writing outside of the formal grievance process. Though the ruling has been appealed, the case has the potential to produce a landmark decision in the area of prisoner-rights litigation.

"Every year I am amazed and humbled by the extraordinary pro bono work that our attorneys do," McGee said. "It's a reminder that lawyers hold a special station in our free society. We are granted privileges of practice, and it follows that we must also play a part in improving the workings of the legal system."

The annual award was first given in 2015, in memory of Richard Seryak, who during his 40-year legal career at Miller Canfield exemplified the standard of pro bono service. Seryak's widow, Dr. Helene Dombrowski, and children, Elizabeth Seryak and Dr. Kaitlin Seryak, established the award to recognize attorneys who continue Richard Seryak's legacy. The Seryak family provides a stipend for the award winner to donate to the legal service organization of his or her choice.

Pro bono service is an essential part of Miller Canfield's culture, and the firm has earned numerous recognitions during the past year, including being named to the State Bar of Michigan Pro Bono Circle of Excellence and Michigan Community Resources' Law Firm of the Year. Kimberly Scott, a principal in the firm's Ann Arbor, Michigan, office, has been named the winner of the 2019 State Bar of Michigan John W. Cumiskey Pro Bono Award.