



Pro Bono Annual Report

2024

Engaged. Vocal. Aligned.

A Message From the Pro Bono Committee

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

What a great year of pro bono work we've had at Butler Snow! We are pleased to present the 2024 Pro Bono Annual Report to tell you all about it. Our firm is different because of our culture, and within our pro bono program, we have focused on a culture of being engaged, vocal, and aligned.

Being engaged: Our attorneys and staff have generously contributed their time and expertise to a wide range of projects. Specifically in 2024, we contributed over 4,800 hours of pro bono services with a total value of over \$2.375 million, which is a 17% increase from our totals in 2023. That work spread across practice groups and involved different types of pro bono service. We also have several exemplary attorneys who exceeded 100 pro bono hours this year and are deserving of our gratitude.

Being vocal: We spent considerable time this year developing multiple ways to communicate about pro bono at the firm. We distributed our monthly "*Pro Bono Bulletin*" highlighting various pro bono opportunities along with the work our attorneys and staff did throughout the year. We developed better methods of tracking and reporting the pro bono work that we do, which you will see in this report. We've celebrated our colleagues' work with social events and handed out "big checks" to honor their achievements. We even made [a video](#) with our firm chairman involving hand puppets to promote our pro bono work.

Being aligned: We spent time working through designing the firm's pro bono program processes and policies. These were undertaken with the help of our General Counsel and by our incredible Pro Bono Committee. We carefully considered and approved sponsorships of pro bono service organizations throughout the firm's footprint. We designed intake procedures to better align and track our progress.

We're looking forward to 2025 and appreciate your commitment and support of the pro bono program here at Butler Snow. Please reach out to me, to Linda, or to any member of our Pro Bono Committee to get involved!



Adam C. Parker
Committee Chair



Linda Warren Seely
Pro Bono Counsel



James A. Beakes III



James H. (Jay) Bolin



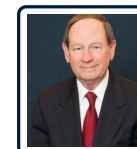
Keith J. Fernandez



Kenyatta L. (Kenny) Gardner



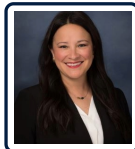
G. Brian Jackson



Stanford G. Ladner



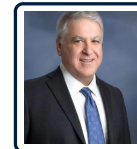
Jim Letten



Ashley J. Markham



Matthew Parker



Kenneth B. Pollock



La'Toyia J. Slay



Matthew S. Touchard



Daniel W. Van Horn

The Case of Karey Whittington: A Journey to Redemption

This is the story about Karey Whittington and his journey to freedom. Who at age 16, was one of one of many juveniles in the Mississippi prison system who had been sentenced to life without parole.

At the time of Karey's conviction in 2004, life without parole was an automatic sentence for anyone convicted of first-degree murder, regardless of age. However, in 2012 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Miller v. Alabama* that life sentences without the possibility of parole for juveniles violated the Eighth Amendment and it was this case that provided an opportunity of hope for Karey and hundreds like him.

When former Butler Snow attorney John Henegan was asked if he'd be willing to take on a Miller defendant – he didn't hesitate when he heard Karey's tragic story. Born into an abusive and neglectful home, Karey's father exposed him to drugs and alcohol from a young age. By age 16, Karey had dropped out of school, was addicted to drugs, and had already been involved in multiple crimes. One night, while attempting to buy marijuana, Karey shot and killed a drug dealer after fearing the dealer was reaching for a weapon. Though the case went cold for four years, Karey was arrested and charged with murder after an informant reported his involvement.

The DA initially offered a plea to manslaughter with a 15-year cap but Karey's father, who was incarcerated at the time, told him to reject the deal and go to trial. Karey was impressionable and seeking approval from his father, so he took his ill-fated advice by rejecting the offer of manslaughter and decided to take his chances at trial. However, once the jury in Karey's trial was selected, his father told him he should flee because he would never receive a fair trial (the jury was mostly African American as was the victim). Unfortunately, that's just what Karey did. Karey was convicted in absentia on September 17, 2004, to life without parole – a few days later, Karey turned himself in.

During the first ten years of his sentence, Karey proved he was a model inmate and showed remarkable change and growth. He worked hard, maintained close bonds with his family and children, and demonstrated a dedication to reform.

In 2015 John Henegan took on Karey's case and was able to get his original 2004 sentence vacated thanks to the *Miller* decision. It was then he enlisted Jordan Walker to help build a case for a new sentencing hearing that supported a sentence of life with parole eligibility. Over the years that followed, John and Jordan investigated Karey's case, gathering witness statements and expert opinions to support his resentencing. The legal landscape shifted as various *Miller* cases were processed, but the courts struggled to apply the ruling effectively. By 2020, COVID delayed progress and John retired, passing the case onto Jordan.

After a series of unfortunate health setbacks suffered by critical key character witnesses in Karey's case, and several continued hearing dates, the resentencing hearing was finally set for May 2024. By this time, Karey had spent two decades in prison, yet he remained positive and continued to grow personally. He continued to prove himself a model inmate – he was appointed a trustee in the Pike County jail, was given supervisory responsibilities in the kitchen, and became a favorite of all the guards—in no small part because of his culinary skills. He was so well-regarded as an inmate, two guards from Pike County testified on his behalf at his resentencing hearing. However, despite the overwhelming and moving testimony presented in favor of Karey, the Judge sentenced Karey, again, to life *without* parole.

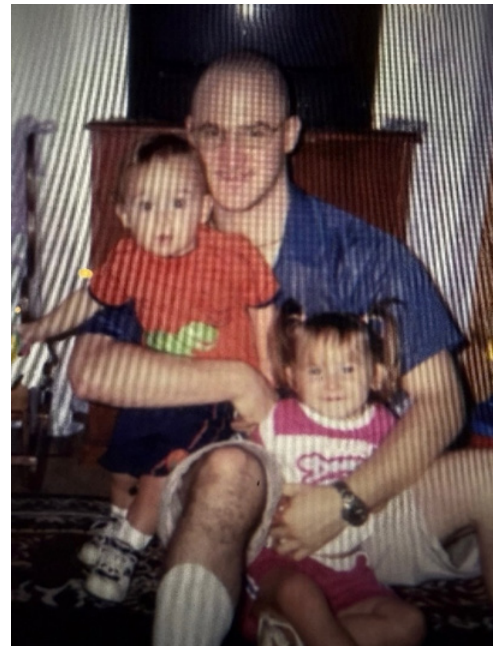
Jordan and the Butler Snow team, which by now had grown to include Chad Byrd, Cailin Sims and former Butler Snow attorney, Frank Rosenblatt, were of course devastated to share this news with Karey. But despite what appeared to be an otherwise “unappealable” ruling, the team remained hopeful as it became apparent the Judge had made several errors in issuing his opinion. For one, the Judge wrongly stated in that Karey shot the victim in the head (the victim was shot in the chest), but the Judge also misapplied the sentencing requirements of Miller which mandates that the resentencing of inmates must be conducted in person pursuant to the Mississippi Rules of Criminal Procedure. This was their opportunity and the team had just ten days to submit a motion to vacate the sentence and request a hearing date.

At the July 2024 hearing, the Judge reconsidered his prior decision, acquiescing to both the factual and procedural errors stated in his prior sentence, and vacated his sentence of life without parole.

At his new sentencing hearing that took place in September 2024, Karey sought and was finally resentenced to life WITH the possibility of parole, but now, with a restrictive term of 20-40 years for minors under Mississippi Law. Practically this meant that for Karey, after having already served over 20 years in prison and a stellar record of good behavior, he would now finally be eligible for parole.

In January 2025, after months of anticipation, Karey's parole was finally granted. The joyous moment came as Karey, once lost to a broken system, was finally reunited with his family. Reflecting on his journey, Karey shared:

"They got to write the last chapter of my life—I get to write the next...God put the right people in my path the past few years to prepare me for this...I can't wait to cook!"



A Final Reflection from Jordan Walker

I can't express how much I appreciate this firm's support for pro bono work and, in particular, this firm's support of Karey's case. You might think it seems a bit distasteful to work towards securing the release of a man convicted of murder. Admittedly, criminal defense does have a stigma to some people, especially when you're talking about violent crimes. But consider this: no class of people in our society are more stigmatized, marginalized and underserved than those in prison.

Everyone has a history, and everyone in this country is entitled to due process and the full spectrum of constitutional rights. As attorneys, we are uniquely positioned to ensure there that no one is excluded from the full range of protections and benefits of the law. This perspective has always been more than sufficient to answer the often-asked question, "How can you defend a criminal?"

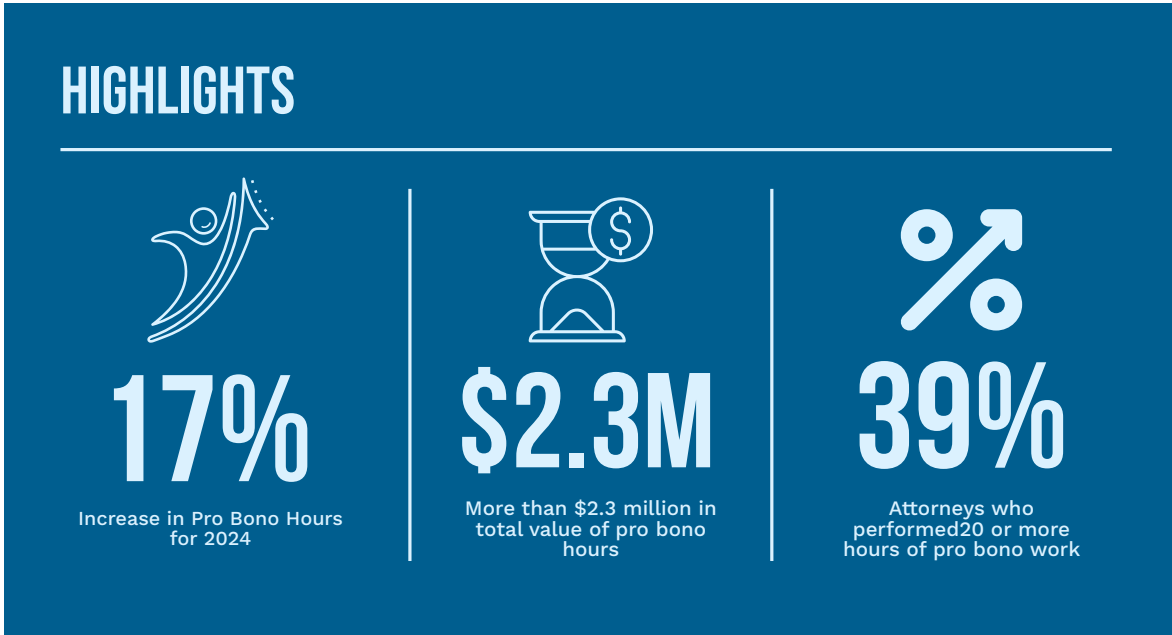
But for me, there's more to it than that. To put it in a Christian context, Jesus encouraged His followers to visit those in prisons—in part because every person is an image bearer of God and should be regarded as such.

We should not be defined solely by our worst moment. That's why at sentencing, both aggravating AND mitigating factors should be weighed. I firmly believe that no juvenile, unless you're talking about the most extreme type of case, should be sentenced to die in prison. Karey is a great example of that principle. His crime was not premeditated and was the result of impetuosity and immaturity fueled by a father who encouraged him to live a life of addiction and crime. Twenty-five years later, Karey is rehabilitated and has a hunger to be the father and grandfather figure for his family that his dad was not. He wants to work hard to support his family when he's released. His family and community will benefit from his release.

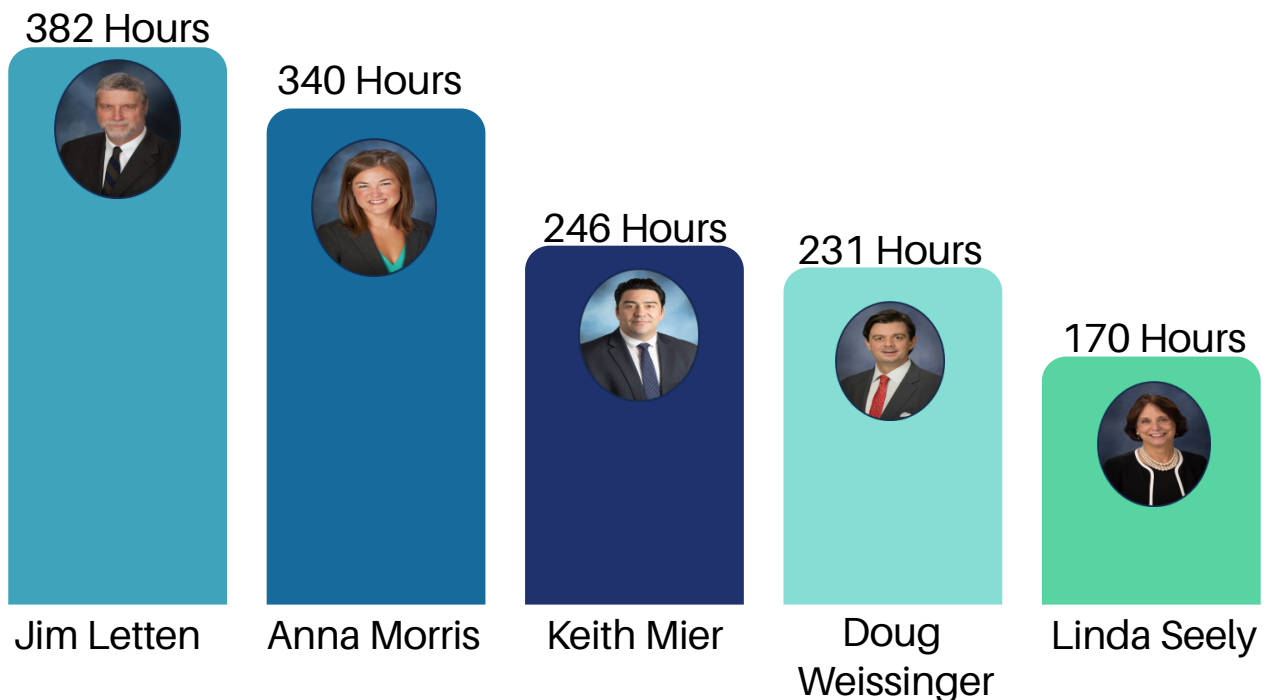
Working on this case has stretched me professionally, pushing me far outside my comfort zone. It has also humbled me in many ways. Again, I'm very grateful for the firm's support during this nearly ten-year journey.



2024 by the Numbers

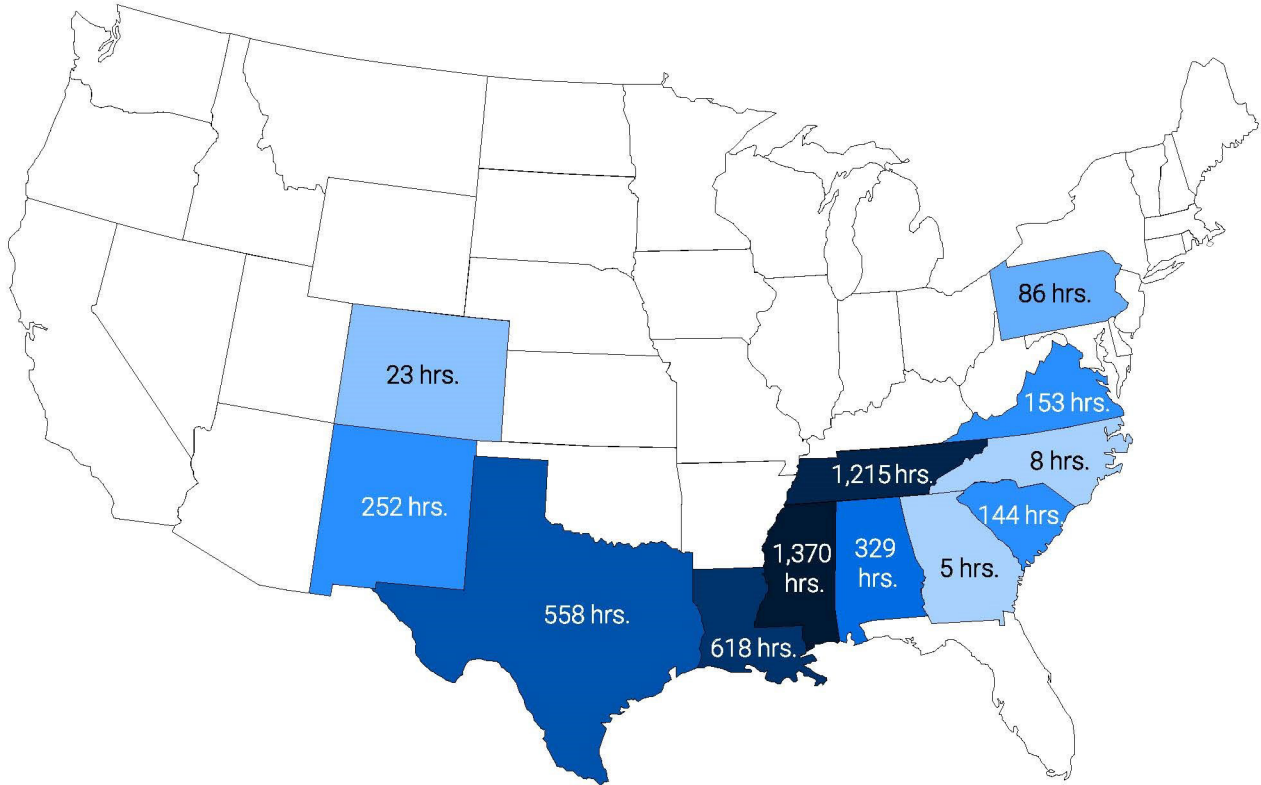


The Fantastic Five: Pro Bono Heroes

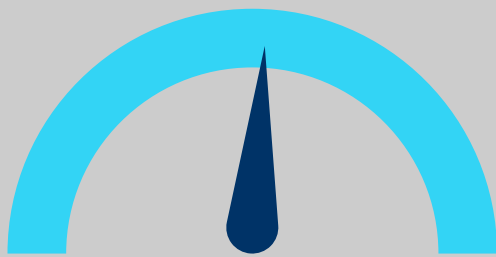


2024 by the Numbers

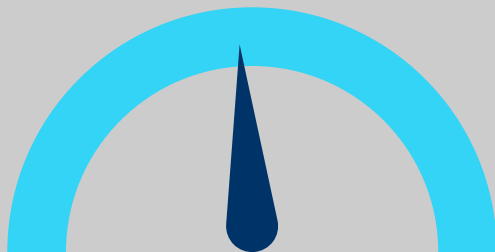
2024 Hours Worked by Timekeeper Location



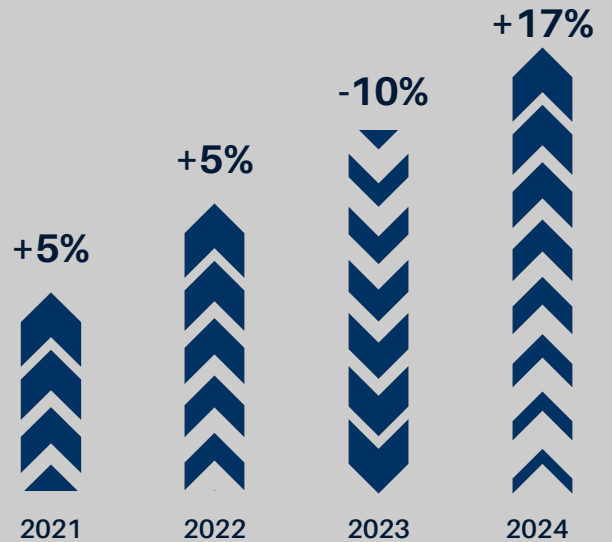
Matters By Area of Law



48% Business



Yearly Pro Bono Hours Since 2020

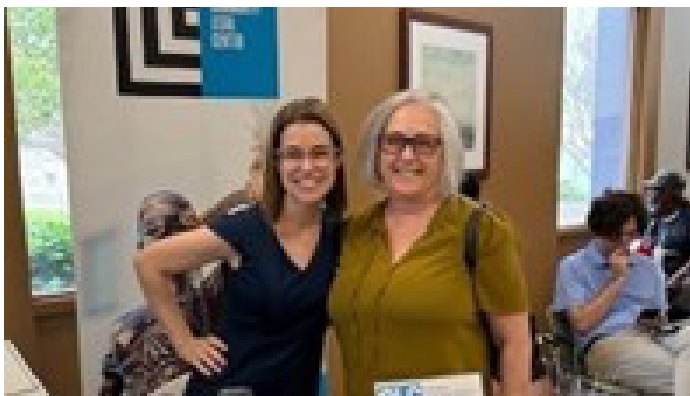


2024 Highlights



Clockwise from the top: Butler Snow attorney Allena McCain at Mock Trial Competition, Georgia Disaster Legal Assistance Pro Bono Webinar, Charleston Pro Bono Lunch & Learn, Butler Snow attorney Anne Crisp and Firm Chair Chris Maddux celebrate Pro Bono efforts.

2024 Highlights



Clockwise from the top: A banner at the Nashville Expungement Clinic, Mississippi Volunteer Lawyer's Program Staff preparing for an expungement clinic, Butler Snow alum, Diana Comes, and paralegal Kathy Ice at a Wills Clinic.