

LAWYERS WHO LEAD BY EXAMPLE 2014 AWARDS

• LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

• PUBLIC SERVICE

• PRO BONO



CAROLINE HELLER
SHAREHOLDER, GREENBERG TRAURIG



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FINDING THE RIGHT educational services for a disabled child isn't supposed to require an attorney. But it may when collaboration between parents and public school breaks down. That's when Caroline J. Heller, a partner at Greenberg Traurig, steps in.

Heller, 41, heads Greenberg Traurig's pro bono program in New York and specializes in complex commercial litigation. Since 2006, she has devoted most of her volunteer legal work to helping low-income parents maneuver through a maze of federal and state laws to win the educational services to which their disabled children are entitled.

"It is daunting for a parent to engage in a due process hearing against a school district without a lawyer," she said.

Partnering with Advocates for Children in New York, Heller has represented some 20 disabled children in dozens of proceedings. In five instances, she appealed administrative decisions to federal court. She won two of those cases, settled another and has two more pending. So important is the issue to her that she joined the board of Advocates for Children in 2012.



Heller, who joined Greenberg Traurig in 2004, doesn't just work with her clients to win special education services; she typically represents them in subsequent proceedings to make sure children continue receiving them.

In April, the firm expanded its pro bono scope to include unaccompanied child refugees. Heller coordinated training for more than 100 of the firm's attorneys across the country. She supervises six of the firm's 25 cases and is representing an 11-year-old boy from Ecuador who is seeking special immigrant juvenile status.

Legal representation is essential for these children to have the chance offered by the law to stay in this country, said Heller, a 2000 graduate of Northwestern University School of Law. "You are standing up for children who otherwise would be

standing up in a courtroom essentially by themselves." In his letter nominating Heller, the firm's pro bono chair, William Silverman, wrote "Caroline's deep commitment to providing pro bono services has made her a pro bono leader at Greenberg Traurig and in New York's pro bono community."
—Len Maniace

Photo by Rick Kopstein