

McCarter and VLJ Obtain First Vacatur Relief Under New Jersey Human Trafficking Prevention, Protection and Treatment Act

Related People:

Geoffrey N. Rosamond
Daniel P. D'Alessandro

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Last year, as part of McCarter's *pro bono* program, McCarter partner Geoff Rosamond and Pro Bono Director Emily Goldberg developed and launched New Jersey's only legal project for victims of sex trafficking. The project, launched in partnership with Volunteer Lawyers for Justice, assists sex trafficking victims in obtaining relief under New Jersey's new Human Trafficking Prevention, Protection and Treatment Act, which provides for varied legal relief for victims of sex trafficking – including vacatur of prostitution offenses and related crimes upon a showing that the “perpetrator” was actually a victim of sex trafficking at the time of conviction. Vacatur renders the offenses null and void.

Geoff successfully argued the very first vacatur Petition in New Jersey, drafted by associate Dan D'Alessandro, on behalf of a *pro bono* client and recognized victim of human trafficking. The petition was granted by the Honorable Bernard E. DeLury, Jr., of the Atlantic County Superior Court, vacating our client's 13 arrests and convictions in New Jersey.

This case is truly groundbreaking: McCarter is the first law firm in New Jersey to develop a sex trafficking project, the first to file a vacatur petition under the state's new trafficking law, and the first to obtain this important relief for a trafficking victim in New Jersey. The relief that Geoff and Dan obtained for the client will help her transform her life for herself and her family. She currently cannot get a job because of her criminal record, but that should change now that she has been justly recognized as a sex trafficking victim – not a criminal.

The client's story is harrowing. She was repeatedly beaten by her trafficker with a five foot copper pipe, branded with a tattoo with her trafficker's nickname to mark her as his “property,” and forced into a life of prostitution governed by quotas established by her trafficker. After escaping her trafficker on her second attempt, the client showed tremendous strength and courage by coming forward and cooperating with the U.S. Attorney's Office, leading to the arrest and conviction of her trafficker – who is currently serving 280 months in federal prison. With this vacatur, she continues to show that strength and moves one step closer to overcoming the abuse she suffered in her past.

On behalf of McCarter's Pro Bono Committee and the entire firm, congratulations to Geoff and Dan for the great work. You have made us proud.