

FIRM NEWS

Settlement Begins Historic Reformation of Public Defense in New York State

March 11, 2015

SRZ and the New York Civil Liberties Union on Oct. 21, 2014 announced a historic settlement that overhauls public defense in five counties and lays the foundation for statewide reform of New York's broken public defense system. The settlement agreement, which a state judge approved on March 11, 2015, was reached the day before the NYCLU and SRZ's lawsuit, *Hurrell-Harring v. New York*, was set to begin trial after seven years of litigation. The lawsuit charged that New York State's decision to abdicate responsibility for public defense to its counties resulted in a patchwork of often understaffed, poorly resourced and largely dysfunctional public defense systems where defendants were routinely arraigned without attorneys, urged to take plea bargains regardless of the facts of their cases, burdened by excessively high bail, and incarcerated for shockingly long periods for misdemeanors and petty crimes. The suit contended that by failing to provide poor defendants with adequate representation, New York State was violating the U.S. Constitution, the state constitution and the laws of New York. With the settlement, New York State acknowledged its constitutional responsibility to provide lawyers to poor defendants who have been forced to navigate the criminal justice system undefended and alone.

Former federal prosecutor and SRZ litigation partner Gary Stein and former Schulte pro bono special counsel Daniel L. Greenberg led the firm's pro bono effort in the case. The team also included litigation associates Jason T. Mitchell and Noah N. Gillespie, as well as dozens of the firm's lawyers and staff from every practice area over the past seven years.

To read the Schulte Roth & Zabel and New York Civil Liberties Union joint press release, [click here](#).

Related People



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Practices

LITIGATION

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