

## FIRM NEWS

## SRZ is Proud to Join the 2022 National Celebration of Pro Bono

October 24, 2022

**Pro Bono is part of SRZ's DNA. From our founders' extraordinary dedication to civil rights and racial justice in the 1960s to the hundreds of thousands of pro bono hours recorded by SRZ over the last 50+ years, we are proud of our legacy of advancing social justice and providing top-quality legal aid to those who need it most.**

Initiated by the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service, the National Celebration of Pro Bono highlights the increasing need for pro bono services nationally and honors the work of lawyers who donate their services throughout the year.

In honor of this year's Celebration, SRZ is highlighting five powerful matters that reflect the breadth and importance of the firm's pro bono practice:

1. National Advocates for Pregnant Women
2. Foundation Rwanda
3. Justice for Greenwood
4. Gary Sinise Foundation
5. Southern Poverty Law Center

Learn more about SRZ pro bono here and the National Celebration of Pro Bono here.

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# National Advocates for Pregnant Women

**“Pregnant women are being arrested, detained and prosecuted for their conduct while pregnant or pregnancy outcomes at an alarming rate. Surprisingly, these cases often arise when a pregnant woman is in the process of seeking healthcare. No one should be forced to choose between seeking critical healthcare and risking prosecution and separation from their families. We are honored to partner with NAPW to advocate for the health, dignity, and human and constitutional rights of all pregnant women.”**

— Heather Wyckoff, Partner, Investment Management



An SRZ pro bono client since

2015, National Advocates for Pregnant Women (NAPW) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit advocacy organization established in 2001 that works to secure the human and civil rights, health and welfare of pregnant and parenting women, and those who are most likely to be targeted for state control and punishment — low income women, women of color and drug-using women.

SRZ has served as NAPW’s outside general counsel on matters related to employment, real estate and other general corporate matters. In the anticipation of the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Dobbs* that eliminated the constitutional right to abortion, SRZ also recently partnered with them to research and draft the timely multidisciplinary guide, *Confronting*

*Pregnancy Criminalization*, which provides necessary tools and strategies to confront the criminalization of all pregnancy outcomes.

SRZ's 2022 Brooks Burdette Fellow Frances Rodriguez, a litigation associate, will support NAPW's urgent work documenting cases and trends across the country, helping to respond to increased inquiries from individuals facing investigations or arrests and conducting legal research and writing in support of criminal defense litigation in which NAPW is directly involved.

## **Impact**

NAPW is tracking a rapid acceleration of criminalization of pregnancy outcomes since the constitutional right to access abortion was overturned and fetal personhood laws are used to control pregnant people with wanted and unwanted pregnancies in new and insidious ways. SRZ will continue to support NAPW in its efforts to ensure that women do not lose their constitutional and human rights as a result of pregnancy.

To further the important cause of women's reproductive rights, we have also partnered with the New York Attorney General's Pro Bono Task Force for Reproductive Rights, and continue our work with Physicians for Reproductive Rights and Global Doctors for Choice.

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# Foundation Rwanda

**“SRZ has been there since Foundation Rwanda’s inception in 2007 — helping us to grow as a grassroots organization and providing expert legal advice every step of the way. Fifteen years later and over 1,700 Rwandan beneficiaries empowered, their unwavering commitment to justice and their innovative approach have allowed Foundation Rwanda to thrive beyond our wildest dreams.”**

— Jules Shell, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Foundation Rwanda



Foundation Rwanda works to

empower second-generation survivors born of rapes that occurred during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and their mothers by providing support for educational opportunities; linking their families to mental health, medical and social support services; providing income-generating and financial literacy programs and small business innovation grants; and creating awareness about the consequences of genocide and sexual violence through photography and new media.

SRZ has supported Foundation Rwanda's mission since its start in 2007. Foundation Rwanda began as a multimedia project by photojournalist Jonathan Torgovnik who recorded the harrowing and heartbreaking experiences of over 30 women genocide survivors. The women lived in deep poverty and often alone, having lost either their families to the genocide or been shunned due to the stigma of rape and bearing a child of the militia. While the women's relationships with their children were complicated, each one expressed their wish for their child to receive an education. Jonathan and Jules Shell founded Foundation Rwanda to cover school fees and other educational costs for the children, and to provide holistic support to the mothers.

Foundation Rwanda is now a movement that has helped nearly 1,700 women and more than 830 second-generation survivors born from rape by sponsoring secondary schooling and vocational training, as well as mental health counseling and holistic support programs that were

suggested by the Foundation Rwanda families themselves. Foundation Rwanda empowers its beneficiaries to determine their own futures and provides the tools and opportunities to help them achieve their goals.

SRZ set up Foundation Rwanda as a 501c3 organization in 2007, helping Foundation Rwanda bring its mission-driven strategic vision to life. SRZ has served as steadfast outside general counsel, working hand-in-hand with Foundation Rwanda over the last 15 years.

### **Impact**

Since Foundation Rwanda's inception, Jonathan's initial multimedia project has immortalized the horrific effects of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and inspired an outpouring of grassroots support with over \$2,800,000 raised to empower Foundation Rwanda families. Foundation Rwanda has supported over 830 students in graduating from secondary school or vocational training, and continues to provide trauma counseling and secure microfinance loans for second-generation survivors. Foundation Rwanda's community counseling groups and youth counseling camps are expanding to support the now young adults and their families as they continue to deal with the trauma surrounding the circumstances of their birth.

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## **Justice for Greenwood**

**“As a Black woman, being given the opportunity to work pro bono with Justice for Greenwood on the Tulsa Descendants Outreach Project was unbelievably moving. I had never heard of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Learning that history was painful but being able to help the living descendants with their case is something I am extremely proud of. I’m also proud to be working for a firm that continues to demonstrate that we matter.”**

— Donna Izzard, Director of Training & Development



Founded by Tulsa-based attorney

Damarion Solomon-Simmons, Justice for Greenwood (J4G) is a network of volunteers, civil and human rights attorneys, academics, experts, Massacre survivors and descendants advocating for reparations and justice on behalf of survivors and descendants of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. J4G is also working to revitalize the Greenwood community and address the major areas of racial inequality and injustice directly caused by the Massacre.

As SRZ's relationship with the Solomon-Simmons and the Greenwood community deepened through our work on the Tulsa Race Massacre litigation, J4G became an SRZ pro bono client. SRZ provides general corporate support to J4G as well as partners with J4G on advocacy projects. SRZ business staff have been a critical resource to J4G's descendant outreach and oral history project.

SRZ attorneys (across every group in the firm) have spent more than 5,800 hours working on the Tulsa Race Massacre litigation and for Justice for Greenwood (J4G), including preparing the survivors' wills and drafting their testimony before Congress. SRZ attorneys also have advocated for the U.S. Justice Department's investigation of the Massacre, meeting with Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke and her team.



SRZ business staff have spent

hundreds of hours providing public relations, communications, docketing and court services, and IT support. In addition, an amazing team of 15 business staff each dedicated several hours a week to J4G, calling

hundreds of self-identified Massacre descendants as part of J4G's descendant outreach and oral history project.

Sara Solfanelli, SRZ's special counsel for pro bono initiatives, acts as J4G's outside general counsel. In addition, Bill Zabel has joined J4G's Board and has begun leveraging his extensive philanthropic network to raise funds for the organization.

## **Impact**

SRZ's initial point of contact with J4G was for an intellectual property issue about the misuse of a likeness from the Massacre, which led to our joining the Tulsa Race Massacre litigation, which then led to J4G becoming a pro bono client. Not only have SRZ attorneys provided critical corporate legal support to J4G during its rapid growth over the last 18 months, to date, SRZ's advocacy for J4G has helped raise more than \$1 million.

Learn how and why SRZ joined the historic Tulsa Race Massacre lawsuit here.

J4G remained in the headlines throughout 2022 across multiple media outlets:

- *Tulsa Massacre Survivors Testify to Congress - The New York Times*
- *Anniversary Event for Tulsa Race Massacre Unraveled Over Reparations - The New York Times*
- *Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors ask Justice Department to Intervene in the Search for Mass Graves - The Washington Post*
- *Finally, Some Recompense to Survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre - The Washington Post*
- *Tulsa Race Massacre: Reparations Lawsuit Survives Motion to Deny and Will Move Forward, Judge Rules - CNN*
- *Attorneys File Amended Petition in Tulsa Race Massacre Lawsuit - NPR Tulsa*

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# **Gary Sinise Foundation**

**“Under the R.I.S.E program, the Gary Sinise Foundation builds customized smart homes for our nation’s first responders and veterans who have made an unimaginable sacrifice to themselves and their families. These heroic men and women run head-first into danger so that the rest of us don’t have to and have suffered catastrophic injuries while doing so. The least we can do is honor their sacrifice by helping the Gary Sinise Foundation provide a home they can return to, a home that helps them restore independence and support empowerment.”**

— *Andi Mandell, Partner, Tax and GSF Supporter since 2012*



American veterans have made

unimaginable sacrifices to protect American freedom. The Gary Sinise Foundation (GSF) mobilizes all of its resources to ensure that severely wounded veterans, their families and caretakers are equipped with the critical tools that allow them to live full and active lives.

SRZ represents GSF, a 501 (c)(3) serving veterans, first responders and their families, in relation to its R.I.S.E. program, which builds 100% mortgage-free, specially adapted, smart homes for catastrophically injured veterans and provides home modifications, mobility devices and adapted vehicles to wounded, ill and aging veterans.

The SRZ team helps with the entire portfolio of documents required for veterans to participate in R.I.S.E. and to receive their houses and related benefits. We handle all of the legal work surrounding the purchase, building and transfer of the homes built as part of the program. SRZ also provides ongoing legal support in other key areas.



SRZ tax partner Andi Mandell has a longstanding relationship with GSF and has been providing pro bono support since its inception in 2012. When she joined the firm in 2020, SRZ continued and expanded support of the Foundation by dedicating additional firm resources and introducing a cross-practice group of attorneys to the pro bono team.

SRZ is wholly committed to GSF's mission and to ensuring that the veterans participating in the R.I.S.E. program continue to have the independent counsel they need.

### **Impact**

To date, the R.I.S.E. program has delivered 81 fully customized homes for veterans that have been catastrophically injured, with eight of those homes being delivered between November 2020 and October 2022.

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# Southern Poverty Law Center

**“What we were trying to make apparent in the Report was that the voting inequities that occurred post-Civil War and during the Jim Crow era are not in the past. They are still happening now!”**

— *Cathy Schmidt, Partner, Individual Client Services*

In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act to outlaw racial discrimination in voting, and it became one of our nation's most successful and consequential civil rights law.

In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder* eviscerated the most powerful provision of the Voting Rights Act: the Section 5 preclearance requirement. Because of a history of discriminatory practices, under Section 5, certain jurisdictions were required to obtain preclearance from the Justice Department or the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia before implementing any change in a voting practice or procedure. Thus, under Section 5, discriminatory voting practices could be blocked before they went into effect. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would restore Section 5.

In support of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement, a team of SRZ lawyers and business staff from seven practice groups worked tirelessly to draft, for submission to Congress, a 100+ page Report titled

“Selma, *Shelby County*, & Beyond: Alabama’s Unyielding Record of Racial Discrimination in Voting, the Unwavering Alabamians Who Fight Back, & the Critical Need to Restore the Voting Rights Act.” The Report reveals current, consistent and well-documented racial discrimination in voting in Alabama and shares the first-hand experiences of 56 Alabama voters. SRZ drafted this Report on behalf of our pro bono client The Southern Poverty Law Center.

“Through the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (“H.R. 4”), Congress has the opportunity and the obligation to restore and strengthen the most effective civil rights legislation ever passed, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (“VRA”). The passage of this legislation would allow Black Americans in Alabama and across the nation to finally realize the as-yet unfulfilled promise of the Fifteenth Amendment: that no state will deny or abridge the right to vote based on race.”

— *The Report, Executive Summary, page 1.*

The Report was submitted into the Congressional Record on August 16, 2021.

## **Impact**

The Congressional Report was a part of a unique, coordinated proactive approach to voting rights advocacy, presenting evidence to support a federal bill that would prevent voter suppression before it happens. More often, legal intervention is initiated *after* restrictive voter suppression state legislation is passed or redistricting has already occurred. For example, SRZ is currently co-counsel with SPLC on a lawsuit challenging racially motivated redistricting in Cobb County, Georgia.

Additionally, a team of 11 SRZ associates and business staff from all three SRZ offices drafted and filed an amicus brief in *Merrill v. Milligan* on behalf of SP LC and other voting rights group with the U.S. Supreme Court, urging the Court to find that Alabama’s redistricting violates Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, because the map has the effect of depriving Black Alabamians an equal voice in government.

# Practices

**PRO BONO**