

PRESS RELEASE

Baker Donelson Team Among Honorees Recognized for Pro Bono Representation of "Somali 92"

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A Baker Donelson team was among a group of volunteers to receive two major human rights awards in recognition of their pro bono representation of a group of 92 men and women who were on a failed deportation flight to Somalia, known as the "Somali 92."

Dylan Howard and Alma Yusuff, both of the Firm's Atlanta office, were part of a large team of volunteers around the country who were recognized with the Advocates for Human Rights' 2019 Human Rights Volunteer Award and the American Immigration Lawyers Association's 2019 Arthur C. Helton Memorial Human Rights Award. The Human Rights Volunteer Award was presented at the Advocates for Human Rights' annual Human Rights Awards Dinner on June 20 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Arthur C. Helton Human Rights Award was also presented on June 20 during AILA's Annual Conference on Immigration Law in Orlando, Florida.

Mr. Howard and Ms. Yusuff were among numerous legal professionals around the country who contributed their time to provide legal counsel to the Somali 92 as part of a class action that resulted from a December 2017 incident in which U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement attempted to deport 92 individuals to Somalia. Over a period of 48 hours, the plane was held up in Dakar, Senegal, where it sat on a runway for 23 hours and ultimately returned to the U.S. During the course of those two days, the men and women on the flight were forced to remain shackled, were unable to stand or use the restroom, and were subjected to physical and verbal abuse by guards.

After the flight returned to the U.S., several organizations filed a complaint to stay the deportations, ensure access to medical care, and provide an opportunity to reopen the deportees' immigration cases. After a call for pro bono volunteers to represent the men and women on the deportation flight, numerous law firms, legal service organizations, law school clinics, and solo immigration practitioners contributed to the effort to provide the Somali 92 with access to counsel to help them reopen their immigration cases. Mr. Howard and Ms. Yusuff were involved in the representation of a young man who was born in Somalia but was raised in the U.S. and was among those being deported to Somalia.

About Baker Donelson's Pro Bono Practice

Through its commitment to pro bono representation, Baker Donelson provides legal services to groups and individuals likely to be marginalized in the legal system due to economic barriers. Over the years, the Firm's attorneys have provided a variety of counsel to many populations including immigrants, refugees, the elderly and the impoverished. Baker Donelson's efforts include work on a wide range of matters, such as advocating for the homeless and organizations that serve the homeless, death penalty litigation, providing corporate legal services to non-profit organizations, and much more. The Firm has been instrumental in efforts such as expanding the Homeless Experience Legal Protection (HELP) program across the Southeast; creating courts dedicated to handling minor legal matters common among the homeless; reining in modern day debtors' prisons operated by municipalities and the private probation services with which they contract; and spearheading and organizing volunteer lawyer programs across Baker Donelson's footprint.