

# Pro Bono Update

---

2025 Report

Yetter  
Coleman  
Trials | Appeals



# Letter from Jamie Aycock

---

Yetter Coleman has a long history of carrying out its deep commitment to the rule of law and conviction that justice should be accessible to all. In our 2025 Pro Bono Update, we're proud to highlight examples of how we bring the same litigation skills we deploy in complex commercial disputes to serve those who can't afford or lack access to legal representation.

Every year, millions of Texans face legal crises threatening their homes, families, and livelihoods—yet most confront these challenges alone. Low-income Americans receive no or inadequate legal assistance for the vast majority of civil legal problems they face. While no single firm can close this justice gap alone, we are determined to do our part to ensure individuals in Texas and across the country have meaningful access to the courts.

Service runs deep at this firm. What began years ago as a commitment to impact litigation—most notably our ongoing Texas Foster Care Reform work—has grown into a comprehensive pro bono program spanning the highest appellate courts to the kitchen tables of families in crisis.

This year, we refreshed our Pro Bono Committee with new members, including me, to broaden the perspectives that guide our public interest work. And once again, we proudly achieved 100% full associate participation in pro bono matters. Our partners remain actively involved in this work, leading by example through active mentorship and direct representation of our clients on the front lines.

Our partnership with Houston Volunteer Lawyers continues to connect our attorneys with individuals in critical need of legal assistance. Through this collaboration, we handle high-stakes family law matters—divorces, custody disputes, and adoptions. We have also expanded our training efforts, hosting a guardianship workshop to equip lawyers and paralegals with technical knowledge required to navigate this complex area of law.

Our attorneys have drafted significant amicus briefs, including multiple briefs on behalf of veterans unjustly denied benefits. We have undertaken immigration matters during a period of heightened scrutiny, standing with those who face profound uncertainty about their place in this country. And we have continued our death penalty representation, including recent involvement with The Innocence Project of Texas, advocating to ensure that our justice system lives up to its ideals.

Our transformative foster care litigation continues as well. This year, we were involved in a petition for certiorari to the U.S. Supreme Court, seeking to hold officials accountable for implementing court orders designed to protect the most vulnerable children in the system. The need for sustained oversight and advocacy in this matter remains as urgent as ever.

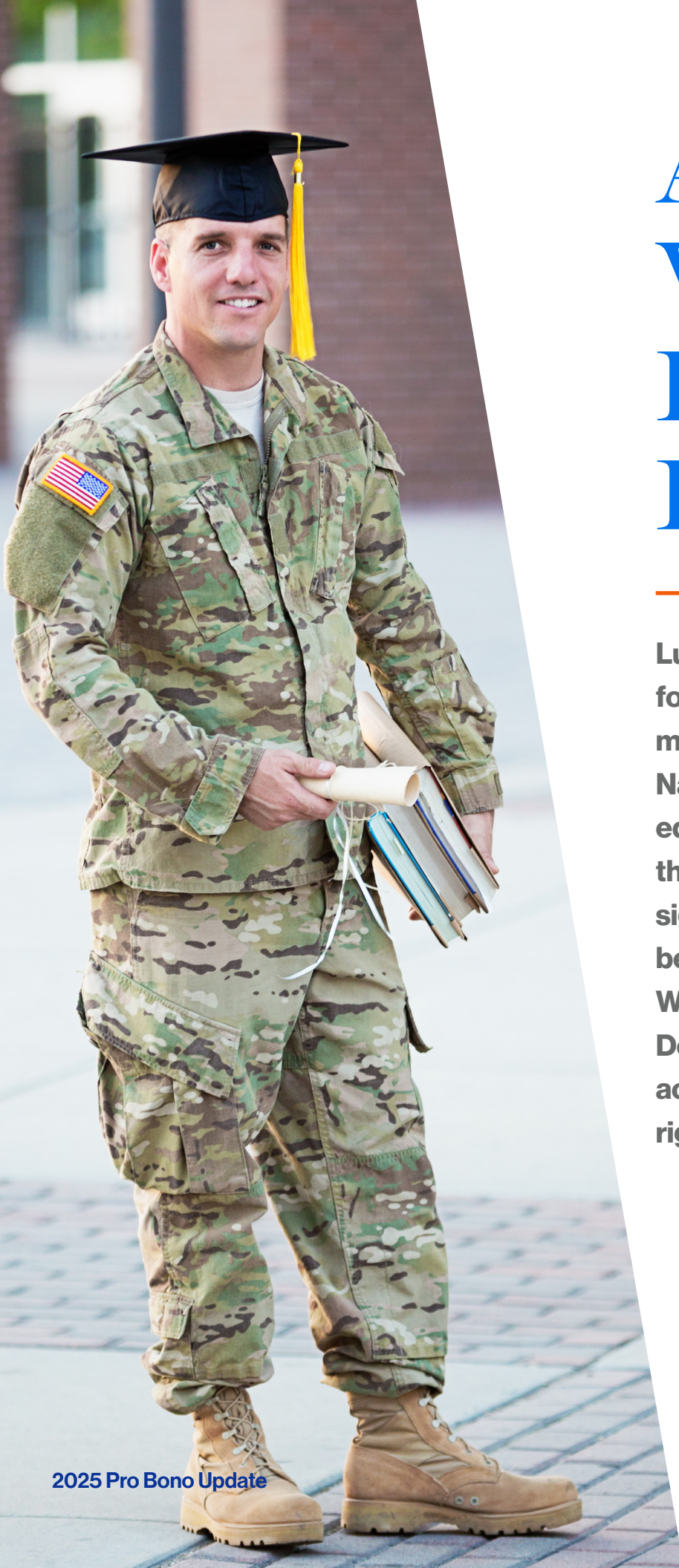
On behalf of the firm's Pro Bono Committee and our lawyers and staff, we are grateful for the opportunity to undertake this important work and look forward to continuing to share the impact of these efforts with you.

Best,  


**2025 Pro Bono Update**



Partner and Pro Bono  
Committee Member



# Advancing Veterans' Education Rights

---

**Luke Schamel has been at the forefront of a growing legal movement to ensure that our Nation's veterans receive the education benefits they earned through their service. Through two significant legal actions filed on behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, he is helping to hold the Department of Veterans Affairs accountable and advance the rights of those who served.**

In *Yoon v. Collins*, Luke filed an amicus brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit that cuts to the heart of a systemic problem: the VA's pattern of wrongfully denying education benefits to veterans. The brief marshaled compelling evidence, including the VA's striking track record over the past seven fiscal years of losing more than 89% of benefits-denial appeals. It also invoked the longstanding pro-veteran canon of statutory interpretation, a legal principle that ambiguities in veterans' legislation should be resolved in favor of those who served. The message was clear: when a benefits-granting law is at issue, a benefits-reducing interpretation cannot stand.

Luke has also filed an Administrative Procedure Act claim against the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, bringing together a powerful coalition that includes the VFW, the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and individual veterans. This case challenges VA rules for administering benefits under the Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI Bills. These rules directly contradict both statutory text and recent Supreme Court precedent—*Rudisill v. McDonough*—which clarified that veterans who qualify for benefits under both GI Bills are entitled to benefits under both. The VA's current rules create arbitrary hurdles and lead to absurd outcomes, such as awarding fewer benefits to veterans who served longer simply because they served continuously rather than with a break in service. This litigation seeks to dismantle those barriers and restore the promise Congress made to our veterans.

These cases reflect an encouraging trend in veterans' law: increased judicial scrutiny of agency interpretations that shortchange those who served, combined with a reinvigorated commitment to the pro-veteran principles embedded in our legal tradition. As courts and advocates continue to push back against restrictive agency practices, veterans stand to benefit from a legal landscape that increasingly honors the intent behind the GI Bills rather than bureaucratic obstacles that undermine them.

## The VA loses 89% of Benefits- Denial Appeals

A systemic issue affecting  
veterans' education rights.



**Luke Schamel**  
Associate



**Delonda Dean**  
Paralegal

# Protecting Children, Preserving Families

---

## In 2025, Yetter Coleman partnered with Houston Volunteer Lawyers to resolve three custody cases.

A grandfather who had taken on the mantle of father sought to adopt his grandson, making their parent/child relationship formal. As a veteran retiree on a fixed income already supporting two grandchildren, he was unable to navigate the adoption process without legal assistance. **Katie Tipper-McWhorter** filed a Petition to Terminate the Parent-Child Relationship and for Adoption in Harris County District Court. Both biological parents voluntarily relinquished their parental rights, acknowledging in their sworn statements that this was “the best available alternative” for their child. As the matter wound its way through the family court system, the grandson turned 18. The application was modified, and our client was able to successfully adopt his now-adult grandson. The grandson will now be able to access his grandfather’s VA benefits to assist with attending college and then, hopefully, medical school.

Child Protective Services removed “A” from her biological mother’s care at birth after her mother tested positive for drugs at the time of delivery. A was placed with a loving family who served as her godparents and primary caregivers. One month after A was born, her mother passed away from a drug overdose. A’s godparents attempted to initiate adoption proceedings on their own shortly thereafter but encountered technical procedural challenges along the way. **Katie Tipper-McWhorter** jumped in, and after months of investigation, due diligence, and hearings, the Court entered its final order terminating all parental rights and granting adoption, finding by clear and convincing evidence that it was in the best interest of the child.

“M” and “N” were adopted and raised by their grandmother at birth, due to their biological mother’s struggles with substance abuse. When their grandmother died in April 2025, the boys were taken in by their great aunt. Unfortunately, one of the boys has a medical issue requiring surgery, but the healthcare providers could not perform the surgery until their great aunt could legally consent on behalf of the minor child. **Henry Humphreys** spearheaded the expedited matter and handled the hearing, directing the testimony supporting the request for custody with **Jamie Aycock** and **Katie Tipper-McWhorter** providing guidance and oversight. The Court orally granted the request, giving our client the ability to provide consent in time to schedule the necessary surgery for her great nephew.



**Katie Tipper-McWhorter**  
Senior Counsel



**Henry Humphreys**  
Associate



**Jamie Aycock**  
Partner



**Sue Csizmadia**  
Paralegal



**Samantha Richey**  
Paralegal



**Alyssa Smith**  
Paralegal



**3 Families Supported**  
Through pro bono custody and  
adoption advocacy in 2025.

# Impact Through Amicus Advocacy

---

**Yetter Coleman submitted three amicus briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court on diverse issues of national concern.**

**Grant Martinez** and **David Gutierrez**, along with Professor Ilya Somin, Antonin Scalia Law School, George Mason University, as co-counsel, represented the Cato Institute in *Noem v. Doe*, a high profile emergency matter challenging the federal government's attempt to abruptly end humanitarian "parole" for citizens of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. This effort had significant immediate consequences, affecting the lawful status and work authorizations of over 500,000 people. The brief explained in plain terms why the program is lawful, rooted in decades of historical practice, and vital to both humanitarian aims and border management. The brief also warned that accepting the government's theory could jeopardize other successful, lawful parole efforts, like Uniting for Ukraine, amplifying the legal stakes of this already significant case.





**Jeffrey Andrews**  
Partner



**Austin Brumbaugh**  
Associate



**Seth Cook**  
Associate



**David Gutierrez**  
Associate



**Chris Johnson**  
Senior Counsel



**Grant Martinez**  
Partner



**Connie Pfeiffer**  
Partner



**Delonda Dean**  
Paralegal

**Jeff Andrews, Chris Johnson, and David Gutierrez** filed a brief on behalf of IP law professors in *MSN Pharmaceuticals, Inc. v. Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corp.*, urging the Supreme Court to resolve long running confusion over the reach of patent claims. The brief argued that inconsistent Federal Circuit rules have created uncertainty that undermines innovation incentives, public notice, and the patent system’s basic quid pro quo. The brief encouraged the Court to clarify whether—and in what contexts—patent claims should cover “after-arising” technologies and to harmonize the answers to those questions with the patent law doctrines of validity and infringement. The brief advocated for a clear, consistent framework that restores predictability and fairness, while reducing disputes.

**Grant Martinez** and **Seth Cook** filed an amicus brief on behalf of an excluded juror in *Irsan v. Texas*, a death penalty case challenging the enforcement of racially discriminatory juror-excusals agreements. The brief urged the Supreme Court to grant review after the trial court excused multiple Black venire members by agreement of the parties, despite on-the-record admissions that race motivated those dismissals. The brief argued that such agreements violate Equal Protection and threaten constitutional interests including the rights of the potential jurors and the public’s confidence in the justice system.

In addition, **Connie Pfeiffer** and **Austin Brumbaugh** filed an amicus brief in the First Court of Appeals on behalf of the Texas Access to Justice Foundation. TAJF was not a party to the underlying case, but the trial court ordered the plaintiff to pay TAJF \$1,000,000 as a sanction. The amicus brief argued that the appellate court should affirm the award because it was consistent with TAJF’s longstanding role in receiving and administering funds on behalf of Texas courts and within the trial court’s discretion.

# Celebrating Pro Bono Excellence

---

Pro bono excellence remains a defining priority for Yetter Coleman. In 2025, we again achieved 100% associate participation and contributed more than 3,000 pro bono hours through local and national organizations—milestones that reflect not only our sustained commitment, but also a deeply embedded culture of service.

We recognized these accomplishments through our annual firmwide pro bono awards, honoring the attorneys and staff who lead by example and reinforce our shared responsibility to serve the communities in which we live and work.

## Impact Award

**This award is presented to an attorney or team who is doing pro bono work that will have an impact beyond a single case.**

**Client:** Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

**Case:** *Yoon v. Collins* amicus brief

**YC Team:** Luke Schamel, Delonda Dean

---

## National and State Recognition



The firm proudly received the 2025 Beacon of Justice Award, marking its second consecutive year earning this prestigious national recognition from the National Legal Aid & Defender Association.



We were honored in 2025 as an “Equal Access to Justice Champion” by Houston Volunteer Lawyers—the pro bono legal services arm of the Houston Bar Association—for once again meeting our annual pro bono case commitment and advancing access to justice in the Houston community.



# Pro Bono Leaders

Yetter Coleman proudly recognizes its attorneys and staff who donate at least 50 hours annually on pro bono matters.

## 200 Hours or More

**Delonda Dean**, Paralegal

**Luke Schamel**, Associate

**Christian Ward**, Senior Counsel

## 50 Hours or More

**Alexander Ades**, Associate

**Austin Brumbaugh**, Associate

**Amy Farish**, Partner

**Bonnie Fraase**, Associate

**Daisy Gray**, Associate

**David Gutierrez**, Associate

**Lily Hann**, Associate

**Henry Humphreys**, Associate

**Andrew Ingram**, Associate

**Grant Martinez**, Partner

**Samantha Richey**, Paralegal

**Julia Risley**, Associate

**Katie Tipper-McWhorter**, Senior Counsel

# Together, We Make an Impact

Learn more about Yetter Coleman's pro bono efforts [here](#)

## Yetter Coleman Pro Bono Committee



**Amy Farish**  
Partner



**Jamie Aycock**  
Partner



**Alishan Alibhai**  
Associate



**Lily Hann**  
Associate



**Courtney Smith**  
Paralegal Manager