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## Leslie Thorne and Emily Westridge Black Named Texas Lawyer's 2019 Co-Attorneys of the Year

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BY BRENDA SAPINO JEFFREYS

Leslie Thorne and Emily Westridge Black were honored as the 2019 Co-Attorneys of the Year at the Texas Lawyer's annual Professional Excellence Awards dinner in Dallas on Wednesday night.

The Haynes and Boone partners were chosen for the unusual legal strategy they devised to persuade a Texas federal judge to issue an order delaying a Honduran woman's deportation.

That strategy, and the resulting July 2018 order, has changed the fate of multiple asylum seekers.

A year has passed since U.S. District Judge Lee Rosenthal of the Southern District



Leslie Thorne, left, and Emily Westridge, right, partners with Haynes and Boone in Austin.

of Texas entered the order. Thorne and Black's client, a 29-year-old woman who fled Honduras with her 12-year-old daughter to escape government-sponsored violence, is living in Virginia with her

daughter and seeking asylum, as Black and Thorne continue to represent her pro bono. The woman is awaiting a work permit.

Meanwhile, the two Texas lawyers and other attorneys

handling asylum cases have used the July 2018 ruling as legal precedent on behalf of other asylum applicants.

“We started using the ruling immediately,” Black said.

Thorne and Black are among a group of Haynes and Boone lawyers who went to the Texas-Mexico border in 2018 to interview migrants at detention centers. The firm represents about 17 families in asylum cases, including the Honduran woman whose case led to Rosenthal’s precedential decision.

The woman and her daughter were separated after they crossed the border, and an immigration official determined that she was not entitled to asylum. The government denied her request to appeal that decision, so Thorne and Black filed a lawsuit in federal court alleging due-process violations and seeking a temporary restraining order to stop her deportation.

The July 2018 order prevented

the U.S. government from deporting the Honduran woman unless she was first reunited with her daughter, and it required an immigration judge to review her asylum request before deportation. It also required that she be allowed to remain in the United States throughout any appeals process.

Rosenthal found she would have suffered “overwhelming and irreparable injury” if the government were allowed to deport her immediately.

The woman had alleged that she sought asylum to escape “grievous, repeated violence” by an ex-boyfriend who was closely associated with a Honduran police force, as well as “persistent threats of violence and death” against her and her daughter by a gang with ties to the Honduran government and police.

The temporary restraining order was the first of its kind in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. And it

came at a time when thousands of children at the border were being separated from their parents and detained.

Black and Thorne said they have turned to Rosenthal’s ruling to help two more clients avoid deportation, and lawyers from other firms doing asylum work have also used it to back up their arguments.

“Since we did this case, we had people reach out to us, just because they are trying to help other individuals with these same types of issues,” Black said.

Addressing the audience at the Belo Mansion on Wednesday evening after accepting their award, Thorne and Westridge Black thanked their families, colleagues and mentors who guided them early in their careers.

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