

Washington Lawyers' Committee Honors Haynes Boone for Pro Bono Work

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PRACTICES Autonomous Transportation, Insurance Recovery, Litigation

The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (WLC) has bestowed a 2023 Outstanding Achievement Award on Haynes Boone.

The award recognizes Haynes Boone's role in forging a partnership with First Transit Inc. to develop a new hiring process that will enable the global transportation company to further its diversity, equity and inclusion objectives and create economic opportunity in the communities in which it operates. The enhanced hiring process was announced [earlier this year](#).

"On behalf of the [Washington Lawyers'] Committee, thank you for your dedication to dismantling injustice and pursuing lasting change," Jonathan Smith, executive director at WLC, said in announcing the award to Haynes Boone. WLC presented the award at its annual Wiley A. Branton Awards Luncheon, which was held June 26 in Washington, D.C.

Haynes Boone Associate [Greg Van Houten](#), pro bono coordinator for the firm's Washington, D.C. office, led the First Transit representation. He was supported by Denver Associate [Michael Freyberg](#); Dallas Partners [Raquel Alvarenga](#), chair of the Labor and Employment Practice Group, and [David Taubenfeld](#); and Washington, D.C., lawyers [Angela Oliver](#), [Karina Sigar Oshunkentan](#), [Scott Benfield](#), and [Mike Scanlon](#).

In a brief Q&A, Greg discussed the First Transit case; the feel-good element of pro bono, and his insurance recovery practice, including the July 11 launch of the [Policyholder Playbook](#), a website that will offer practical tips to policyholder advocates.

Q: How did the firm get involved in the First Transit matter?

Greg: I had been looking to forge a long-term partnership with a legal aid clinic in D.C. that could provide a steady pipeline of pro bono opportunities to our D.C. office. We were fortunate to begin our relationship [with WLC] with the First Transit matter, which is the exact sort of case we want to handle — one that allows us to directly help people in our community while also seeking reforms that will have a positive impact beyond D.C.

Q: Can you briefly summarize the dispute?

Greg: We represented three African American clients who were affected by a criminal background check policy. We developed a good working relationship with First Transit and their attorneys, who shared our understanding and belief that overly broad background check policies can result in the exclusion of qualified applicants of color. We ultimately agreed to work together to thoughtfully renew and refresh First Transit's background check policies based on rigorous recidivism research.

Q: Were you surprised when you heard WLC was honoring the firm with the Outstanding Achievement Award?

Greg: I was shocked and very proud. What's so special about it is that recognizes the collaborative efforts of our legal team, which spanned many practice groups and offices and even involved summer associates. It also, of course, speaks to the fantastic result we achieved for our clients.

Q: What draws you to pro bono work?

Greg: It is an amazing feeling to use your legal expertise to make a tangible improvement in someone's life. Pro bono work is also a great way to help lawyers develop their skills, but the main draw, for me, is the ability to have a transformative impact on a client's life.

Q: Tell us about your insurance practice and the launch of the Policyholder Playbook.

Greg: I'm a litigator who helps clients in many industries recover insurance proceeds. I'm incredibly excited about the Policyholder Playbook. Every other week, I will post examples of winning techniques used by the best advocates for policyholders. In designing the site, I drew inspiration from my prior career as a teacher and varsity baseball coach. The site will feature short videos and written posts — or "plays" — that diagram the strategies attorneys, brokers, and risk managers have used to achieve victories for policyholders.

Q: Do you still coach baseball in your spare time?

Greg: No, not right now, but I hope to coach my son, who is 16 months old, very soon.