

INDIVIDUAL HONOREE



BARAK WROBEL, *Holland & Knight LLP*

Land use attorney helped nonprofit organization expand its portfolio of housing facilities for homeless LGBTQ young adults

Nonprofits that provide housing and case management services need land and facilities to operate their programs. Yet, navigating zoning and other real estate law issues can be overwhelming, and expensive, even for sophisticated organizations. Land use expert Barak Wrobel has counseled multiple clients on land use, zoning regulations, and other potential thorny real estate issues, including a substantial project for the Ali Forney Center spanning the past four years. Barak applied his land use and zoning law expertise to a long series of zoning applications and presentations, resulting in the necessary zoning variances for the project. Thanks to Barak's assistance, Ali Forney can move forward with its plans to establish a 29-bed housing program in Astoria, Queens for homeless LGBTQ youth.

Employment:

Holland & Knight LLP
Senior Counsel, Land Use Practice

Graduate of:

B.A. Western Washington University
M.U.P. Hunter College of the City University of New York
J.D. Brooklyn Law School

Lawyers Alliance clients:

Ali Forney Center
Barrier Free Living
Evergreen: Your North Brooklyn Business Exchange
Voces Ciudadanas

Q. What motivates you to participate in, or support, pro bono?

Holland & Knight has a strong commitment to pro bono work and really supports attorneys in their pro bono engagements. Our firm continually seeks opportunities to fit potential pro bono clients with attorneys who have the expertise that is being sought by such clients. When we saw that Ali Forney Center was seeking an approval from the Board of Standards and Appeals, we jumped at the opportunity to represent them in this matter.

Q. Share a tip for making time for pro bono during the COVID pandemic.

Regardless of the time, get involved in a pro bono matter you feel passionate about or that fits neatly into your existing practice, and it will be as easy to make time for the matter as any of your other billable matters.

Q. Share a fun or unexpected moment from pro bono work through Lawyers Alliance.

The hearings at the Board of Standards and Appeals drew unexpected opposition from neighboring residents that had not previously indicated any objection to the project at earlier Community Board hearings. It was an unexpected challenge to the project that we were able to overcome.

Q. What's the most rewarding aspect of pro bono work?

Obtaining a positive result for a client who may not have been able to afford the representation is incredibly rewarding.

"Barak has worked tirelessly to support the work of the Ali Forney Center and our development of a 29-bed housing program for homeless LGBTQ youth. Barak embodied our mission and commitment to young people who have been denied a home by their families due to their LGBTQ identity – he is a powerhouse of knowledge, compassion, and conviction in his work to defend and represent the needs of our marginalized youth. We owe a great deal of gratitude to Barak for getting us through hearings, redrawing of plans, variance applications, and even the organizing of community support in favor of our project."

— Alex Roque
President and Executive Director, Ali Forney Center