

Perkins Coie Pro Bono Team Secures International Child Custody Win for Mother Who Fled Saudi Arabia with Her Daughter

SEATTLE (December 4, 2023)—A Perkins Coie pro bono team has won an international jurisdictional challenge related to child custody proceedings before the Washington Court of Appeals for a mother after she fled Saudi Arabia with her daughter.

The pro bono client, Bethany Al-Haidari, had married a Saudi man in Saudi Arabia, but when her then-husband became abusive, Bethany sought a divorce and custody of their daughter in Saudi court. The country's male guardianship system denied her a fair hearing at every turn. A Saudi judge refused to consider evidence of the husband's abuse because it was not corroborated by two male witnesses. And the judge stripped Bethany of her parental rights because she was a "foreigner" and "new to Islam."

Bethany fled to the United States with her daughter, having been forced into a settlement depriving her of the right to make any major decisions for her daughter. Notwithstanding the settlement, a Washington Superior Court concluded it had authority to determine custody under the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act.

Perkins Coie associate [Marten King](#) presented oral argument on behalf of Bethany before the Washington Court of Appeals, and the [appeals court agreed](#) that the Superior Court properly exercised jurisdiction because of "ample evidence" that Bethany was at risk of being subject to Saudi laws punishable by death.

The firm's pro bono legal team also included [Harry Schneider](#) and [Katie O'Sullivan](#).

"This was an incredibly difficult process and I appreciate the Perkins Coie pro bono team who took the time and energy to listen and take action to support my case and made it possible for me to get through this," Bethany said.

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