



## Matthew Adams Receives 2016 Award of Merit

*Seattle immigration law attorney recognized for his work to change federal immigration policy*

SEATTLE, WA [Sept. 30, 2016] — The Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) presented Seattle attorney **Matthew Adams** with its 2016 Award of Merit. The award is in recognition of his work to change federal immigration policy at the regional and national levels. WSBA President **Bill Hyslop** presented the award at the WSBA Annual Awards Dinner on Sept. 29, 2016, at the Sheraton Seattle.

Adams is the legal director of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP), where he has served as a staff member for 18 years. Adams has served on the King County Public Defenders Advisory Board since 2014.

Adams was co-counsel in *Franco-Gonzalez v. Holder* (along with the ACLU, Public Counsel, Mental Health Advocacy Services, and the law firm of Sullivan & Cromwell), which was completed in fall 2015 after five years of litigation. This case was the first time that the federal government has been required to appoint government-funded counsel to a class of individuals facing deportation hearings in immigration court. The class-action case represented a class of individuals with mental disabilities facing deportation hearings in immigration courts in California, Washington, and Arizona (the three states with long-term immigration detention facilities within the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals' jurisdiction). Until *Franco*, people with mental disabilities who could not afford attorneys were required to represent themselves in immigration court and immigration judges lacked the authority or ability to appoint counsel. The permanent injunction also required the federal government to implement a screening system to determine if persons suffer from a mental disability that may impair their ability to represent themselves in deportation proceedings. Following the initial *Franco* ruling in 2013, the federal government announced that it would expand the procedural protection nationally, meaning that the case has led to policy change on a national level.

Currently, Adams is co-leading the legal team that is pursuing a class-action litigation, *J.E.F.M. v. Lynch*, seeking to have a federal court recognize the right to appointed counsel by children facing deportation proceedings in immigration court. Under the present immigration system, children of any age are not given the right to appointed counsel in immigration court hearings, while the federal government is represented by a prosecuting attorney. Adams has already argued multiple hearings before a federal district court judge in Seattle, including the motion for class certification, which was granted by Judge Zilly on June 24, 2016, certifying a class of all unrepresented children in removal proceedings in the Ninth Circuit. The case has received national attention.

"Matt's work, individually and in collaboration with colleagues around the country, has changed federal immigration policy at the national level and in our region," said **Jorge L. Baron**, executive director of NWIRP. "[He] embodies the values that our profession should aspire to."

"Immigrant rights are human rights. Any legal system that forces people with severe mental disabilities to defend themselves against government attorneys makes a mockery of any notion of justice," said Adams. "None of this would be possible without the great team of co-counsel, as well as my own team at the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project."

In 2008 and 2014, Adams received the Jack Wasserman Memorial Award from the American Immigration Lawyers Association for excellence in immigration law litigation. In 2013, he received the Washington State Access to Justice Board's Advocacy Award.

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**About the Washington State Bar Association**

The WSBA is part of the judicial branch and is authorized by the Washington Supreme Court to license the state's 37,789 lawyers and over 1,000 other legal professionals. In furtherance of its obligation to protect and serve the public, the WSBA both regulates lawyers and other legal professionals under the authority of the Court and serves its members as a professional association — all without public funding. The WSBA's mission is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, to ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice.

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