

Winston Pro Bono Case Prompts Change in Alabama Tenant Law

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Houston attorneys Paula Hinton and William Logan were featured in a *Texas Lawbook* article titled [“How a Partner-Associate Duo in Houston Helped Change Alabama Tenant Law,”](#) published on July 16, 2018. The article highlights [a critical win secured by a Winston pro bono team and The University of Alabama School of Law’s Civil Law Clinic](#) for a single mother in Alabama during a landlord-tenant dispute, which resulted in a change to the law to better protect vulnerable tenants statewide.

William, a first-year associate who graduated from the University of Alabama School of Law in 2017, brought the case to Winston’s attention as a result of his involvement with the school’s Civil Law Clinic. He was working at the clinic through Winston’s [Public Interest Law Fellowship Program](#), a summer fellowship program offered to incoming associates. During his time at the clinic, William became involved in a case concerning Bridgette Morrow, a single mother who was evicted from her Tuscaloosa home after she asked city inspectors for help with electrical repairs that her landlord refused to make. After attempting to bring claims against her landlord in a local district court, her claims were dismissed.

The law clinic appealed to an Alabama circuit court, which ruled in favor of the landlord. But William still wanted to help Ms. Morrow and other tenants similarly affected.

“It was still pretty raw with me. The whole situation bothered me—especially since this was virtually happening across the entire state. The people this was happening to were people potentially facing homelessness... As a matter of practice, most of them are *pro se*. It’s a very difficult situation for them,” William explained.

Once at Winston, William secured approval to take on Ms. Morrow’s case pro bono with the help of Paula Hinton, also a University of Alabama Law alum, the university’s civil law clinic, Legal Services Alabama, and Alabama Appleseed. William and Paula took an appeal of the circuit court’s decision to the Alabama Court of Civil Appeals, which reversed the Tuscaloosa Circuit Court’s ruling in an opinion that put an end to the Alabama courts’ customary practice of barring evicted tenants from suing their landlords weeks later for improper eviction.

“Quite frankly I’m proud of this [case] because it reminds me of something my father would have done...it really makes a difference in people’s lives,” Paula said.

William agreed: “It absolutely is one of those cases that excited me about being a lawyer. She was being denied... the chance to even be heard.”

When discussing the case, Paula and William explained that the model act that applied in Ms. Morrow’s case was problematic. They said that it failed to take into account that many of the tenants who would have needs to file action against their landlords would not be legally savvy enough to bring the claims forward within the 14-day post-eviction statute of limitations period.

Paula notes that this opinion is already motivating Winston to research which other states are following a similar model in their landlord-tenant law and evaluate how firm lawyers can provide pro bono assistance.

“We’re seeing if we can take what we learned in Alabama with respect to how tenants are being treated,” she said. “We’re going to do our own research...and reach out to Texas Appleseed or some other groups like Appleseed in states where the model act might exist.”

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