

Cooley Amplifies Racial Justice Work Coast-to-Coast With Pro Bono Hires

Kristen Johnson of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and Kara Wilson of Meta join Cooley in New York and San Francisco, respectively.

By Jessie Yount

What You Need to Know

- Kristen Johnson and Kara Wilson, pro bono counsel focused on racial justice work, have joined Cooley.
- Johnson comes from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, while Wilson returns from Meta.

Cooley, in pursuit of more pro bono work to advance racial justice, has added special counsel Kristen Johnson and Kara Wilson in New York and San Francisco, respectively.

Johnson comes to the firm from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, while Wilson returns to Cooley after a three-year stint as in-house counsel at Meta and Instacart.

“Kristen and Kara bring extraordinary skill sets to the team, and we see these new hires as a crucial part of our way of looking forward at what we can build together,” said Maureen Alger, a partner and manager of the firm’s pro bono practice.

Alger noted that for the past two years, over 1,000 timekeepers have been involved in pro bono work at Cooley. As part of the firm’s

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan, the firm has been more strategic and intentional about expanding pro bono work and relationships with civil rights organizations focused on racial justice.

In the past, Cooley’s lawyers have represented victims of the attack by white supremacists during the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville in 2017. Its lawyers also work with the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana to fight police misconduct and partner with various chapters of the Innocence Project on wrongful convictions.

“Cooley stands out in its pro bono efforts, and has a concrete plan for DEI. This sort of work shows that Cooley is living up to its [reputation] as a next-generation law firm,” Johnson said.

Johnson, while at the LDE, defended Black and Latino girls subjected to strip searches in schools as well as Black voters challenging access to election ballots, among other voting rights, educational equity, economic justice and criminal justice cases.

Wilson, an associate at Cooley for nearly eight years, previously



Kristen Johnson, left, and Kara Wilson, right, of Cooley.

Courtesy photos

represented tenants subjected to racial discrimination, as well as a number of individuals in asylum cases. She maintained an active pro bono practice as in-house counsel, partnering with legal services organizations focused on criminal justice reform, according to the firm.

Wilson and Johnson will also help Cooley expand partnerships with corporate clients and get in-house counsel more involved in pro bono work, through the particular lens of racial justice.

“Racial justice is everyone’s issue,” Johnson added. “Everybody has different roles to play in solving these thorny problems and making progress, and Cooley is taking on such an important role as a large law firm.”