

In our last issue, you read about **Alicia**, a young mother who suffered years of abuse at the hands of her twin sons' father, Patricio. Alicia was forced to flee the Dominican Republic with her sons after an appeals court upheld a judgment giving custody of her sons to their abusive father. Patricio followed Alicia to New York City, demanding the return of the children. White & Case externs Averie Hason, Paul Godinez and Justin Brown took on Alicia's case, which resulted in a landmark decision allowing the Bronx Integrated Domestic Violence Court to modify a child custody order granted by a court in the Dominican Republic. This ruling gave Alicia a second chance to prevent her two young children from suffering further abuse at the hands of their father—an option she didn't have in the Dominican Republic.

When we left off, a trial to determine permanent custody had been scheduled to begin in January.

Prior to the trial date, Patricio appealed the decision. And to prevent the court from awarding custody to Alicia before his appeal was heard, Patricio requested a stay of the civil and criminal proceedings pending before the Bronx Integrated Domestic Violence Court.

In their appeal brief, the White & Case team argued, contrary to Patricio's claim, that a stay would not be beneficial to the parties or the children and that a trial on the merits would be a waste of judicial resources. They also highlighted the dilatory behavior of Patricio's attorney, citing his numerous missed court appearances, refusal to return phone calls and unwillingness to respond to discovery requests. In late March, after reviewing briefs from both parties, the Appellate Court ruled in Alicia's favor and denied Patricio's petition for a stay. The trial to consider permanent custody was scheduled to begin on April 1st.



The White & Case team prepared Alicia for trial and accompanied her to court on April 1st. Moments before the trial started, **Patricio consented to awarding Alicia full custody of their sons and agreed to supervised visitation.** As part of the settlement agreement, the father withdrew his appeal of the Court's decision asserting jurisdiction. Alicia was also granted a two-year order of protection.

The lives of Alicia and her children are forever changed, thanks to the perseverance and

professionalism of Averie, Paul and Justin. Commenting on the case, Paul states, **“How often do you get the chance to be involved in a case where you receive drawings from kids decorated with hearts thanking you for keeping their family together?”** Working on a case like this makes you feel pretty good at the end of the day. Although this was one of the most difficult pro bono cases I've worked on, it was the most gratifying.”