

## Former Sotomayor Clerk Julie Veroff Joins Cooley's Appellate Team

Clerking for Justice Sonia Sotomayor “was more in every dimension than I could have imagined—more challenging, more fun, more heartbreaking, more encouraging. I tell people going into the court they will experience every emotion available to you,” Cooley’s Julie Veroff says.

BY MARCIA COYLE

Julie Veroff, a Rhodes scholar and former clerk to Justice Sonia Sotomayor, is the latest appellate hire at Cooley, the firm from which Elizabeth Prelogar **recently departed** to become the acting U.S. solicitor general at the Justice Department.

Veroff, a Yale Law School graduate, launched her private practice with Cooley following the completion of a Skadden fellowship with the American Civil Liberties Union’s Immigration Rights Project. She joins Cooley as an associate.



Cooley offices in Washington, D.C.

Photo: Diego M. Radzinski / ALM

Prelogar, a former assistant to the U.S. solicitor general and clerk to the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, left the firm in mid-January for her new position at Main Justice. She had **joined** the firm last year.

Veroff clerked for Sotomayor in 2017, and her co-clerks that term were Raymond Tolentino, counsel at Kaplan Hecker & Fink; Carmen Iguina Gonzalez, a senior staff attorney at the

ACLU Immigrants’ Rights Project; and Elizabeth Bentley, an associate at Jones Day. Veroff will find at least one other former Supreme Court clerk at Cooley with whom to share clerking experiences. Cooley part-



Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

Credit: Diego M. Radzinski / National Law Journal.

ner Kathleen Hartnett clerked for the late Justice John Paul Stevens and for U.S. attorney general nominee Merrick Garland, who sits on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

“Julie’s recent arrival along with other key hires over the last few years illustrates Cooley’s continued commitment to strategically grow the firm’s appellate practice,” said Hartnett, who served on the **DOJ transition team** for then president-elect Biden. “We—and our clients—are delighted that Julie has joined our deep bench of skilled appellate attorneys. She brings fantastic expertise and a strong dedication to our values.”

Veroff shared her thoughts about her transition from the nonprofit world to private practice in a recent interview.

***The National Law Journal: You had a life before the law as executive director of a nonprofit organization that mobilized students in the fight against AIDS. What did that involve?***

Veroff: When I graduated from college, I went to Oxford for two years to do a master's degree in development studies, basically an international development degree. I was looking for opportunities in the international development, international human rights space. The organization I ran had been started by students who were in my class in college. At the time, the organization was looking for someone to come in and kind of help it transition from a really student-run, very informal organization into something slightly more put together. I came in in that capacity. I started in the summer 2009 for three years before going to law school.

It was quite small when I started, staff-wise. We had two full-time staff in the U.S., and we had operations in Rwanda. By the time I left, we had four staff in the U.S. and I believe five in Rwanda, and we had student chapters in hundreds of colleges and high schools across

the U.S. We also worked with people in Rwanda who were partnered with an organization called Partners in Health, which was co-founded and run by Paul Farmer. Over the course of his life, our students raised about \$1 million for Partners in Health, and also did advocacy work, education on their campuses, community staffing operations. It was a small staffing operation but with a large impact in terms of the number of people involved.

***You decided to seek a Skadden Fellowship after law school and lower court clerkships but took a detour to the Supreme Court. What was your thinking?***

The way [the fellowship application] works is you find the organization first and then together you pitch a project or a focus of work to the Skadden Foundation.

In my case, things shifted a bit because when I applied for the fellowship, many of us thought Hillary Clinton would be the president. I deferred my fellowship for a year to clerk for Justice Sotomayor. At the time I did my fellowship, you had a different administration; the Muslim ban was at hand; children were being separated, and so forth. The landscape just looked very different. I clearly felt working on behalf of civil rights and civil liberties

of immigrants and immigrant communities was important before, but then once I knew I was going to be doing that fellowship in the context of the Trump administration, the work just felt even more significant.

So for two years and three months, I was focused on litigating challenges to barriers that the Trump administration erected—bars on asylum for people who enter between ports of entry, by people who transited through a third country to the United States, agreements that allowed the U.S. to transfer asylum seekers to Central American countries and other cases of the remain in Mexico policy. It was a fantastic experience. It was a series of emergency TROs, PIs, that went from the district court to the Supreme Court and back down.

***You have a strong interest in human rights. What or who is the source of that commitment—parents? A mentor?***

Sometimes I feel like the question should be reversed for others and asked: Why don't you feel compelled to further the rights of others? In any case, my grandparents were Holocaust survivors and were very vocal, and that certainly was very influential on me as I was growing up. And I think I was just really lucky to have a com-

munity of friends who are also service minded and encouraged that. I don't think there was a singular "ah-ha" moment. We all have such a short time here, and we're all, I think, intended to make the world a little bit better.

***What was your clerkship with Justice Sotomayor like and what did you take away from it?***

It was more in every dimension than I could have imagined—more challenging, more fun, more heartbreaking, more encouraging. I tell people going into the court they will experience every emotion available to you. In terms of takeaways, one is I formed a really extraordinary bond with my co-clerks. They're really special people, and Justice Sotomayor really strives to build a team among her co-clerks and hires with that in mind. It was a tough experience in a lot of ways, and to have a team was truly wonderful. She's an extraordinary jurist, and she is an extraordinary person.

She just has an attention to every individual space, and I think that's in part because she has attention to every individual person in her life. She knows everyone in the Supreme Court building. She has married so many of the Supreme Court police officers. She takes care to

look at all the details, and all the stories, and I think that's something I certainly took from her. I'm really grateful I won that lottery ticket. She's a really powerful voice, and my sense is she sees part of her role as connecting the court with the country and the country with the court.

***As the Skadden fellowship was coming to an end, what were you thinking about in terms of your own legal career?***

I was looking to make a move into private practice. I've been joking that the last time I was part of a profit-making enterprise was when I worked at Jamba Juice in high school. All my co-clerks were looking at firms as we were finishing our term at the court but because of my fellowship, I wasn't in the mix of that process.

One of the things I found about Cooley is they're really excited about pro bono work, and its part of their policies and practice. It's something I want to continue doing, and I could see that could be a big part of my practice here.

***You will be doing appellate work and complex litigation. Have you argued in any appellate court?***

No. I've argued in federal court and I've had the pleasure of helping other people prepare

for arguments when I was at the ACLU and I've helped prepare briefs.

***Do you hope to continue to do pro bono work in the immigration area or are there other areas of interest?***

One of the first cases I was kept on was a class action challenging conditions of confinement in immigration detention facilities in California and the heightened risk of COVID, and I continue to work with some of my former colleagues. I'm also interested in other impact immigration-related work. I'm also excited about voting rights, reproductive justice and criminal justice work. One of the reasons I was excited to transition into this practice is this opportunity to expand that portfolio of public interest work a little bit.

***What do you do to relax and get away from law?***

I have a 1-year-old, so I chase him around. We're lucky to live in the Bay area. The weather is great, now that the fires have subsided, and we get out a lot.

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