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Our Legal Team

Dale L. Wilcox

Executive Director and General Counsel

Mr. Wilcox joined IRLI in 2014 as its chief executive officer and is responsible for the overall management of the organization. He is a distinguished litigator who has dedicated his career to protecting civil rights and promoting accountability, transparency, and integrity in government and fidelity to the rule of law. Prior to joining IRLI, he served as State and Local Director for the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) where he developed and executed a successful legislative program to advance FAIR's mission to stem unlawful immigration and promote legal immigration levels consistent with the national interest.

Prior to FAIR, Mr. Wilcox worked with Judicial Watch, Inc. (JW) for more than ten years where he served as counsel and Executive Director of Judicial Watch's Mid-Atlantic Regional Headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia. In this regard, he was involved in several seminal JW investigations that uncovered government corruption, waste, fraud, and abuse, including the Filegate, Chinagate, Commercegate, and Pardongate scandals, litigated numerous FOIA lawsuits that forced release of important government records, including the CCTV camera footage of American Airlines Flight 77 hitting the Pentagon on 9/11 and documents establishing government abuse and incompetence relating to the handling of the anthrax letters sent to members of Congress, and successfully litigated a variety of high-profile cases, including a whistleblower and discrimination lawsuit on behalf of a Hispanic Immigration and Naturalization Service special agent involved in the Elian Gonzalez matter and a whistleblower lawsuit on behalf of a senior government official whose waste, fraud, and abuse disclosures caused Congress to suspend paying its United Nations dues in the latter 1990s.

Prior to joining JW, Mr. Wilcox's law practice mainly concentrated on civil rights where he successfully challenged as unconstitutional the newly enacted campaign finance schemes in the states of Arkansas, Colorado, and North Carolina. In addition, he successfully represented members of the United States House of Representatives and Indiana House of Representatives in actions before the Federal Election Commission on campaign finance issues and in recount and contest proceedings.

He is a *cum laude* graduate of the Regent University School of Law and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in political science with a minor in philosophy from the University of Louisville. He is a member of the bars of the United States Supreme Court, United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth, Fifth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh and District of Columbia Circuits, United States District Courts for the District of Columbia and Northern and Southern Districts of Indiana, Supreme Court of the State of Indiana, and District of Columbia Court of Appeals.

Julie B. Axelrod

Director of Investigations and Staff Counsel

Ms. Axelrod joined IRLI in 2015 as Director of Investigations and Staff Counsel. A native Californian, she has always had an acute sense of the dangers of out of control immigration and the importance of the rule of law. Prior to joining IRLI, she was Government Relations Counsel at FAIR where she followed immigration related legislative and policy developments on immigration and promoted its mission of immigration enforcement and reducing immigration levels in line with the national interest.

Before joining FAIR, Ms. Axelrod was a staff attorney at Judicial Watch, Inc., where she fought for government transparency and enforcement of the law. At Judicial Watch, Ms. Axelrod litigated federal Freedom of Information Act cases in the United States District Court of the District of Columbia and state open records act cases in California. She also assisted in challenges to the Houston, Texas Police Department's sanctuary policy for illegal aliens and a Montgomery County, Maryland College's policy of granting in-state and in-county tuition to illegal aliens.

Before moving to Washington, D.C., Ms. Axelrod was an associate at the leading global law firm of Mayer Brown, LLP in Palo Alto, California. She also clerked for the Honorable James Lawrence King in the Southern District of Florida upon graduating law school. She graduated *magna cum laude* from Dartmouth College with a B.A. in Classics. She received her J.D. from the UCLA School of Law, where she was the Senior Articles Editor of the Journal of Law and Technology. She is a member of the bars of the District of Columbia, California, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia and Southern District of California, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth, Ninth, and District of Columbia Circuits, and the United States Supreme Court.

Olivia de la Peña

Communications Associate

Ms. de la Peña joined IRLI in 2017 as the Communications Associate. As a first generation Mexican immigrant, Ms. de la Peña advocates for an immigration policy that protects the rights and interests of the American people and upholds the rule of law. She is responsible for devising IRLI's media strategy and is the primary contact for all media inquiries.

Ms. de la Peña graduated from George Mason University in 2016 with a B.A. in Communications concentrating in Public Relations. While in college, she interned on Capitol Hill for Rep. Blake Farenthold, the House Republican Conference, and former Rep. Cresent Hardy. She also won George Mason University's Undergraduate Award for Political Journalism for her coverage of the Benghazi hearings, Congressional speeches, and interviews with Members of Congress. After graduation, she created educational and promotional videos for National Defense University's College of International Security Affairs in Washington, D.C.

Christopher J. Hajec

Director of Litigation

Mr. Hajec joined IRLI in 2017 as its Director of Litigation, and is responsible for overseeing IRLI's public interest litigation. He has focused his career on constitutional and other civil rights law in the public interest, and has had an abiding concern about the many adverse effects of illegal and excessive legal immigration on American jobs and communities.

Prior to joining IRLI, Mr. Hajec was an attorney at the Center for Individual Rights (CIR), where he litigated a string of high-profile cases, including the defense of videographer James O'Keefe in suits brought by former ACORN employees, a class action suit on behalf of Asian American students discriminated against by the New York City public schools, and a case that resulted in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals striking down Texas's psychologists licensing statute as an overbroad restriction on free speech.

Before CIR, Mr. Hajec was an officer in the Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps, where he served as a defense counsel before courts-martial and then as Appellate Government Counsel, arguing over 100 appeals before the Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals and the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces. He was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal on the basis of "superior performance."

He received his law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School and his undergraduate degree, *cum laude*, from the University of Michigan. He has a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Miami, and studied philosophy and sociology at Oxford University in England. He is a member of the bars of the United States Supreme Court, the District of Columbia, and Pennsylvania.

Michael M. Hethmon

Senior Counsel

Mr. Hethmon is IRLI Senior Counsel, where he has worked on public interest advocacy litigation in federal and state trial and appellate courts and administrative tribunals since 2006. He has designed, drafted and defended immigration-related legislation and regulations in federal, state and local jurisdictions throughout the United States.

Mr. Hethmon earned a B.A. in Near Eastern Studies from UCLA, an M.I.M. from Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management, and received his J.D. from the University of Maryland Law School in 1999. He is a member of the Maryland and District of Columbia state and federal bars, and admitted to practice before the First, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh federal appellate courts as well as the United States Supreme Court, and has appeared *pro hac vice* in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Hethmon worked his way through law school while a *qui tam* relator in a federal foreign corruption case, and has litigated pro bono land use and sustainable development cases in Maryland. Prior to practicing law he worked and travelled widely overseas. He has written on a range of immigration law and policy topics, from amnesty to xenophobia.

Elizabeth A. Hohenstein

Staff Counsel

Ms. Hohenstein joined IRLI in 2015 as Staff Counsel. She graduated *summa cum laude* from Marymount University with a B.A. in Criminal Justice and Sociology. Prior to attending law school, she worked at the Federal Bureau of Investigation handling employment and performance issues. Ms. Hohenstein earned her J.D. from George Mason University School of Law where she served as the Editor-in-Chief of the Civil Rights Law Journal. She developed an interest in immigration law and policy after working in the Office of the Administrative Hearing Officer for the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review. She is a member of the bars of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals and Virginia.

Kris W. Kobach

Of Counsel

Mr. Kobach is the 31st Secretary of State for Kansas, sworn in on January 10, 2011. Prior to his election as Secretary of State, Mr. Kobach was a Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Missouri – Kansas City for 15 years. He is nationally-recognized as an author of legislation to stop illegal immigration, and known as a litigator who represents US citizens, cities, and states in cases involving illegal immigration across the country. Secretary Kobach graduated co-valedictorian from Washburn Rural High School in Topeka, KS. He went on to earn his bachelor of arts degree with highest distinction from Harvard University; earn a doctorate in political science from Oxford University in England; and earn a Juris Doctor from Yale Law School. He has since published two books and numerous articles on elections, political science, constitutional law, and immigration law.

As a White House Fellow, Secretary Kobach worked in the personal office of United States Attorney General John Ashcroft, serving as his chief advisor on immigration law and border security. After the 9/11 attacks, Secretary Kobach was put in charge of Department of Justice efforts to prevent terrorists from exploiting gaps in U.S. immigration controls. Secretary Kobach has testified before Congress multiple times on numerous topics. He also has been a frequent legal commentator on several news programs including The O'Reilly Factor and Fox and Friends on the Fox News Channel, Lou Dobbs Tonight on the Fox Business Network, and Talk of the Nation on National Public Radio. In addition, he has been a frequent columnist for the New York Post and the Washington Times. Each week he hosts The Kris Kobach Show heard every Sunday on KCMO 710 AM talk radio from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Mr. Kobach is licensed to practice law in the states of Nebraska and Kansas, as well as numerous federal courts.

John M. Miano

Of Counsel

Mr. Miano is a nationally known advocate for American workers. He is a co-author with Michelle Malkin of the book entitled, *Sold Out: How High-Tech Billionaires & Bipartisan Beltway Crapweasels Are Screwing America's Best & Brightest Workers*, that documents how the immigration system has been hijacked by political elites to become a weapon against ordinary Americans. He has testified before Congress several times on the adverse effects foreign labor has on American workers and has been a frequent guest on cable news and radio shows. He is also a Fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies.

Mr. Miano received his J.D. degree *cum laude* from Seton Hall University School of Law and a B.A. in mathematics from the College of Wooster. He is a former computer programmer-turned-lawyer and has written three books on computers. Mr. Miano is licensed to practice law in the District of Columbia, New York, and New Jersey and is admitted to the bars of the United States Supreme Court, United States Courts of Appeals for the District of Columbia and the Third Circuit, and the United States District Courts for the District of Columbia and New Jersey.

Sarah R. Rehberg

Director of Legislative Affairs and Staff Counsel

Mrs. Rehberg joined IRLI in 2017 as its Director of Legislative Affairs and Staff Counsel. She is an experienced government affairs professional who has dedicated her career to advancing sensible immigration reform and upholding the rule of law. Prior to joining IRLI, she served as State and Local Director for the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). In that role, she assisted state and local lawmakers by devising legislation to end dangerous sanctuary city policies and protect American workers, and educated the public on the threat of unchecked immigration and unsecure borders.

Mrs. Rehberg also previously served as FAIR's Government Relations Director, where she pursued federal legislative initiatives to combat illegal immigration and to restore legal immigration to a level consistent with the national interest. She has also worked on immigration and homeland security issues as a Legislative Assistant and Counsel to a Member of the United States House of Representatives, and has experience working in state government.

She received her J.D. from the University of the Pacific, where she focused in Public Law and Policy, and her B.A. with distinction from the University of Michigan in Political Science. She is a member of the bars of the District of Columbia and

Maryland.

Ian M. Smith

Investigative Associate

Mr. Smith joined IRLI in 2015 as an Investigative Associate. He brings to IRLI his experience using investigative, legal, and communication tools to promote government transparency and accountability. Prior to his association with IRLI, Mr. Smith worked in the U.S. Senate as well as for several public interest organizations and law firms. He is a member of the New York Bar and worked in finance prior to earning his J.D. at the University of New South Wales in Australia. He has authored dozens of articles for various Beltway newsites on immigration law and policy.

Mark S. Venezia

Staff Counsel

Mr. Venezia joined IRLI in 2017 as Staff Counsel. After a career in investment management, he earned his J.D. from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. He moved to the D.C. area to spend his third year at the Antonin Scalia Law School.

Mr. Venezia brings a wealth of experience in management, country analysis and the securities business. During his nearly 30 years as Director of Global Fixed Income at Boston based Eaton Vance, he visited over 40 countries, his group traded the foreign exchange and securities of nearly twice as many, and he developed interests in foreign political systems and immigration. Mr. Venezia was previously Vice President of Network Utilities, the first options pricing provider to run off of a personal computer network. He left in 1984, to start Eaton Vance's first mortgage-backed securities fund and, years later, the Global Macro Absolute Return Fund.

Mr. Venezia earned his M.B.A from the University of Chicago, M.A. in Philosophy (all but dissertation) from the University of Illinois, and B.A. in Economics from Stanford. Mr. Venezia is a Chartered Financial Analyst and a member of the Virginia Bar. While his waiver application to the District of Columbia bar is pending he is under the supervision of D.C. Bar member Dale L. Wilcox.

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IRLI is a supporting organization of the [Federation for American Immigration Reform](#).

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