

# Triumph Over Traffickers

When McGuireWoods' [Betsy Hutson](#) accepted the "[Litigation Firm of the Year](#)" award from the Human Trafficking Legal Center in October, her client Kendra Ross stood side-by-side with her.

Ross' childhood was stolen by a "regimented cult" and its leader, who forced her to work without pay, benefits or breaks from age 11 until 21, until her escape. Ross subsequently met Hutson at a specialized aftercare shelter for trafficking victims and, over the course of three years, Hutson earned Ross' trust.

Hutson put together a McGuireWoods team of litigators that filed a civil suit on Ross' behalf in federal court. Ross alleged in her complaint that the Value Creators Inc., formerly known as the United Nation of Islam (UNOI), and its leader, Royall Jenkins, made her work more than 40,000 uncompensated hours from 2002 until 2012. McGuireWoods lawyers crafted an innovative legal strategy and calculation for unpaid wages that a U.S. district judge in Kansas adopted, granting Ross' motion for default judgment and awarding her nearly \$8 million in damages, plus costs and attorney's fees. Judge Daniel D. Crabtree noted that the defendants stole Ross' childhood and violated her basic human and civil rights.

The May 23, 2018, judgment is the [largest single-plaintiff trafficking award in American history](#).

Working with Hutson on the McGuireWoods legal team were partners [Jonathan Blank](#) and [Phillip Chang](#); associates Lauren Cafferty Mahaffey, [Chris McEachran](#), [Kayla Marshall](#) and [Katlyn Davis Farrell](#); international attorney [Andrew Thornton-Dibb](#); and counsel [Cristin Traylor](#).

The pro bono victory led the Human Trafficking Legal Center's board of directors to name McGuireWoods "[Litigation Firm of the Year](#)." At the center's second annual On My Side Awards reception in Washington, D.C., Hutson and Ross accepted the award together.

"This has been a really long process," Hutson [told AP](#). "It is a result of a lot of years of hard work. We see that she has made incredible progress, coming out of this cult and facing her perpetrators."

"It is difficult for trafficking survivors to articulate the complexities of fear, dependence, loyalty, and the myriad of other conflicting emotions that influenced them to remain with their traffickers," Hutson recently wrote in an article for [Trafficking Matters](#), a project of The Human Trafficking Institute. "Working with Kendra, our aim was to have a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach that empowered her, avoided re-victimization, and restored a sense of autonomy and control to her."

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