

# TRAILBLAZERS

## CRIMINAL LAW

### DANIEL RUZUMNA PATTERSON BELKNAP WEBB & TYLER LLP



**PIONEER SPIRIT** As a summer associate, Daniel Ruzumna watched his mentor expertly cross-examine witnesses in court, and knowing that those skills were developed as an assistant U.S. attorney, Ruzumna wanted to do the same. “While at the U.S. attorney’s office, I loved the factual patterns and human interest of criminal law. Since then, the vast majority of my work has been in the criminal arena.”

**TRAILS BLAZED** Ruzumna successfully represented the New York-based nonprofit Alavi Foundation in one of the largest forfeiture trials in the U.S. When the government tried to seize nearly \$1 billion in cash and real estate from the foundation based on U.S. sanctions on Iran, Ruzumna challenged the judgment based on the District Court’s error in ruling on the Fourth Amendment, statute of limitations, evidentiary and asset forfeiture issues. The Second Circuit overturned the verdict and remanded the case for retrial. “We then went back and tried the case in a five-week jury trial, lost, appealed and raised issues around suppression of evidence. We took an aggressive approach, including a lot of document discovery, which was available to us because it’s technically a civil case. We were able to discredit much of the evidence. In this case, like others, the standard for forfeiture is a lower burden of proof than the standard of ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’ needed to convict, but we were still able to discredit enough of the evidence to challenge the judgment.”

**FUTURE EXPLORATIONS** Ruzumna has seen the increased use of asset forfeiture and believes the trend will continue with more international cases. “I think the government will enhance its use of forfeiture going forward because many defendants are not available for prosecution in the U.S., and this is the next best way to reach them. Where the government recognizes real problems in securing a criminal conviction, it will continue to use asset forfeiture as a punitive measure with a lower burden of proof.”