

Nuts & Bolts of Family Law

32nd Annual Seminar

Dade Legal Aid, Put Something Back

Dade Legal Aid's 32nd Annual Nuts & Bolts of Family Law Seminar celebrated the spirit of pro bono work and the dedication of legal professionals committed to making a difference in our community. With an impressive lineup of speakers and award recipients, the event underscored the importance of access to justice and highlighted the contributions of those who tirelessly serve others.



Introduction

The event commenced with warm welcomes from Mark Brown, Esq. and Brittany Bonner, Esq. of Dade Legal Aid/PSB. Their introduction set the stage for a day dedicated to recognizing the invaluable work of legal advocates. The Nuts & Bolts Seminar could not have been done without the two of them, who act as our Managing Attorney at Dade Legal Aid/PSB and Pro Bono Manager & Project Attorney, respectively.

The Importance of Pro Bono

Chief Judge Nushin G. Sayfie of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit emphasized the critical role of pro bono service in the legal profession. Appointed to the bench in 2007 and currently serving as Chief Judge, Judge Sayfie has a distinguished career marked by her leadership in the Criminal Division and her initiatives such as the Veterans Treatment Court. Her experience as an Assistant Public Defender and her extensive trial experience make her a prominent advocate for pro bono work. Chief Judge Sayfie highlighted how pro bono services not only provide essential legal aid to underserved populations but also enrich the professional lives of attorneys by offering opportunities for growth and fulfillment. The session underscored the ethical responsibility of lawyers to contribute to their communities.



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The Automated Family Practice: To AI or Not?

Jacqueline M. Valdespino, Esq., and Christopher A. Ozomgi led a compelling session on integrating AI into family law practice. Valdespino, with 37 years of experience in matrimonial and family law, and Ozomgi, a passionate legal aid fellow and recent Cornell Law graduate, delved into the benefits and challenges of incorporating AI tools in legal procedures. They highlighted confidentiality issues, stressing the importance of informed consent when disclosing confidential information. Suggested safeguards included controlling AI access, avoiding the upload of sensitive files, and not pasting sensitive information. They discussed AI platforms such as Cara by Casetext and LawGeex, which are designed to streamline case management and increase efficiency. Valdespino and Ozomgi encouraged lawyers to leverage these resources to enhance their practice.

Alimony and the Recent Changes Under Section 61.08

Jordan B. Abramowitz, Esq., discussed the recent changes in alimony laws. As a board-certified attorney in Marital and Family Law, Abramowitz

leveraged his extensive experience and involvement in the Unified Family Court to offer attendees a comprehensive understanding of the evolving legal landscape. He highlighted significant updates to Florida statute 61.08, including the elimination of permanent alimony, and addressed the revised presumptions regarding the length of marriage.

Paternity and the Presumption of Equal Timesharing

Marck K. Joseph, Esq., founder of The Joseph Firm, discussed the presumption of equal timesharing in paternity cases. Known for his dedication to justice and excellence in family law, Joseph's insights were invaluable. He explained that under Florida statute 744.301, the mother of a child born out of wedlock is the natural guardian unless the father establishes paternity under statute 742.011 or 742.10. The most practical way to determine paternal rights, aside from marriage, is to file a petition to establish paternity, determine parental responsibility and child support, and create a parenting plan and timesharing schedule under statute 742.



Modifications of Timesharing and Child Support

General Magistrate Gina Mendez-Locke shared her expertise on modifications of timesharing and child support. With a background in criminal and family litigation and extensive experience as a General Magistrate, Mendez-Locke offered practical advice and legal perspectives, exploring substantial changes to Florida statutes and their effects on child support.

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Updates from the Bench

Honorable Samantha Ruiz Cohen, Administrative Judge of the Family Division, provided updates from the bench. Judge Cohen's vast experience in various judicial divisions and her commitment to pro bono work underscored the event's theme of legal advocacy.

The Hague Convention

Ronald H. Kauffman, Esq., explored the intricacies of The Hague Convention in family law. With decades of practice and numerous publications, Kauffman's session was both informative and engaging. The Hague Convention aims to protect children from international abduction by a parent by providing a process to return the child to their habitual residence. The sessions covered a background of the Hague Convention, as well as a breakdown of the affirmative defenses in Articles 12, 13, and 20. His insights into the practical application of these defenses added significant value to the session.

Anatomy of a Legal Aid Family Case

Geoffrey Valdes-Alba, Esq., detailed the challenges and triumphs of handling family cases through Legal Aid. His dedication to representing low-income residents and mentoring new attorneys highlighted the impact of pro bono work. He discussed the practical aspects of filing family law cases and explained the typical cases that are typically handled. This presentations offered valuable insights for attorneys who might have been unfamiliar with the specifics of family law but are interested and committed to taking pro bono cases, providing a comprehensive overview of the key steps, challenges, and ethical considerations in representing clients through Legal Aid.

Pro Bono Awards

The seminar would not have been complete without acknowledging and honoring the exceptional individuals who have shown unwavering commitment and dedication to pro bono service. Their selfless efforts and tireless advocacy for those in need are a testament to the core values of Dade Legal Aid, Put Something Back. Our mission to provide access to justice for all would be incomplete without them, and we are grateful for their continued support and dedication. Award recipients included:

Pro Bono Award Recipients



Juan D. Berrio, Esq. is a partner at Berrio & Berrio, P.A. He was recognized for his extensive pro bono work in family law and commitment to clients. Mr. Berrio has dedicated over 250 hours to Put Something Back pro bono clients in a variety of Guardian ad Litem, Domestic Violence, and Family law cases.



Jason E. Bloch, Esq. was celebrated for his long-standing dedication to pro bono service. He is a former recipient of Dade Legal Aid's Access to Justice Pro Bono Award. He has provided over 450 hours on a variety of pro bono Family, Dependency, Domestic Violence, and Housing cases.

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Pro Bono Award Recipients



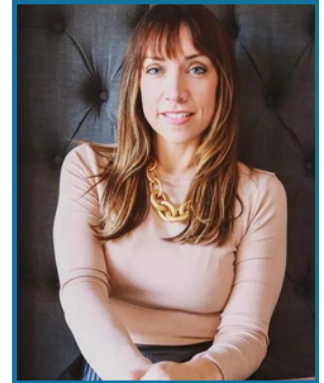
William Brady, Esq. and his firm were honored for their unwavering support in assisting domestic violence victims. Mr. Brady is an outstanding volunteer who never says “no” when called upon to accept pro bono Family matters, including Dissolution of Marriage, Support Modification, Relocation, Domestic Violence, and Child Advocacy cases.

Maria C. Gonzalez, Esq., of Maria C. Gonzalez, P.A., was acknowledged for her decades of service and expertise in Marital, family, and Guardianship matters. We are grateful for her unwavering leadership and support, having served as a speaker and donated over 460 hours to Put Something Back.



Tenikka L. Jones, Esq. serves as an Attorney ad Litem in Juvenile Dependency court through PSB. She was commended for her profound impact on the lives of vulnerable youth, including more than 800 pro bono hours towards supporting and advocating for a teen client from age 13 to 18.

Raquel A. Lacayo-Valle, Esq. is a partner at the Law Offices of Ronald H. Kauffman. She was recognized for her work in complex family law cases and dedication as a Guardian ad Litem through Dade Legal Aid’s Put Something Back Program and the 11th Circuit’s Florida Guardian ad Litem Program. Ms. Lacayo-Valle has spent over 125 hours of pro bono service through our project on Custody, Guardian ad Litem and Wills cases.



Cristina Morales, Esq., is a partner at Gedeon & Morales Law Group. She graduated from St. Thomas University School of Law, Magna Cum Laude. She is celebrated for her passion and empathy in handling family law and Guardian Ad Litem cases. She performs hundreds of hours of pro bono services.

Carolyn A. Reyes, Esq., of Grass Reyes & Associates, was honored for her dedication to family law and her role as a family law mediator and Guardian Ad Litem for children. She has provided her services in 15 complex pro bono Divorce, Custody, and Guardian ad Litem cases.



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Nuts & Bolts of Family Law Pro Bono Award Recipients



Jeffrey Rynor, Esq. is a founding member of Mitrani, Rynor, Adamsky & Toland, P.A. He was acknowledged for his strong commitment to pro bono work in custody and domestic violence cases. He has spent over 360 hours on Custody, Divorce, Paternity, Dependency, and Domestic Violence cases, demonstrating his strong commitment to pro bono work. Recently, he successfully handled a TPR on behalf of a minor child. He served as President of the Miami-Dade Bar and has served on the Florida Bar of Governors since 2018.

Erik C. Alexander, Vice President at Truist Wealth Legal Specialist Group, was praised for his extensive community service and support of Dade Legal Aid's mission. With over 30 years of private banking experience, his decades of service include devoting countless hours on the Board of Directors of the Boy Scouts of America, South Florida Council, and on the Disaster Workforce for the American Red Cross.

Closing Remarks

This event was a testament to the power of pro bono work and the extraordinary efforts of legal professionals who strive to make justice accessible to all. Their dedication and service are truly inspiring, and we are proud to celebrate their contributions.

Thank You to Our Generous Sponsors:



Congratulations to Our Pro Bono Award Recipients!



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Photo Gallery

