



SEMINOLE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION  
**LEGAL AID SOCIETY**

# Annual Report

## 2021-2022 fiscal year

SERVING THE COMMUNITY AND ENHANCING ACCESS TO  
CIVIL JUSTICE IN SEMINOLE COUNTY SINCE 1975

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# MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SILVIA MCLAIN

*'Tis the Season to be'* ....is the name of our fundraiser event this year.

For me, *Tis the Season to be Joyful* for the many accomplishments that we have been able to achieve with the help of all our amazing pro bono attorneys, donors, board and staff members. Our organization was recognized for our tireless efforts in providing exceptional services to Seminole County residents and we were awarded the prestigious St. Martin de Porres award for our social justice accomplishments.

This year, in addition to our individual representation of client in legal matters, we have made concentrated efforts to extend our community legal outreach to disadvantaged residents in Seminole County. Our community outreaches include:

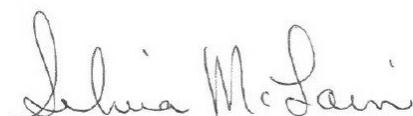
- ◆ Veteran free Legal advice clinic held every month at the Casselberry library
- ◆ Sealing and Expungement Legal Workshops held monthly at the Sanford Library and monthly virtual presentations
- ◆ Project Rise legal presentations held monthly at the Sharing Center concerning topics such as housing, bankruptcy, and consumer law to class participants
- ◆ Seminole State College free legal advice clinic (Project Graduation) held two times a month at the Sanford campus to assist vulnerable college students
- ◆ Community Events held throughout the county such as the Sanford Hispanic Fair, the Sanford Senior Fair and the Disabled Community Fair that was held at Winter Springs High school
- ◆ Participation in the domestic violence prevention taskforce, child abuse prevention taskforce, affordable housing advisory committee, children cabinet, United Way executive council and Catholic attorney guild.

*Tis the Season to be Grateful* for our wonderful pro bono attorneys, who have contributed legal services valued over \$262,465 and made monetary contributions of \$31,500 to help vulnerable residents in Seminole County with family, housing, guardianship, and other legal matters.

*Tis the Season to be Merry* for our financial donors and sponsor whose support enhances our ability to provide free legal services to the poor, disabled, abused, veterans and elderly in Seminole County.

*Tis the Season to be Jolly* for our incredible legal staff whose tirelessly work to bring access to the justice system to residents who could not afford an attorney to resolve their difficult legal matters. Their work included a successful appeal to the Fifth District Court of Appeals to assist an intellectually disabled foster youth gain access to a Medicaid waiver.

*Tis the Season to be Thankful* for our tremendous members of our board of directors. I am so appreciative of their time and dedication to serve on our board. This year, Attorney Debbie Warner led our board of directors. Attorney Warner always inspires me with her expertise, engagement, and professionalism. She is a wonderful leader of our board this year.



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# MISSION

Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society opened our doors in 1975.

We provide high quality civil legal services and education free of charge to disadvantaged and low income residents of Seminole county so as to protect their personal safety, promote their self-sufficiency, and improve their quality of life.

For many, we provide their only access to the judicial system to resolve critical legal problems.

We assist:

- ◆ Survivors of domestic violence
- ◆ Veterans, who need to resolve a civil legal matter
- ◆ Relatives seeking custody of minor children when parents are addicted to opioids
- ◆ Families of disabled children requesting appointment as guardian advocate when their child turns 18 years of age
- ◆ Elderly people seeking legal help to preserve their housing
- ◆ Disabled foster youths needing to obtain Medicaid waivers
- ◆ Unemployed persons seeking the sealing and expungement of an eligible crime to obtain a job
- ◆ Economically disadvantaged parents wanting to obtain a safe timesharing plan for their child and support to financially care for the child

In addition, we also administer the pro bono attorney project in Seminole County which expands our ability to help additional Seminole County residents with their legal needs. We also participate in several special legal projects, members of domestic violence and child abuse prevention taskforces, Seminole County Affordable Housing Advisory Board and Seminole County children's cabinet.

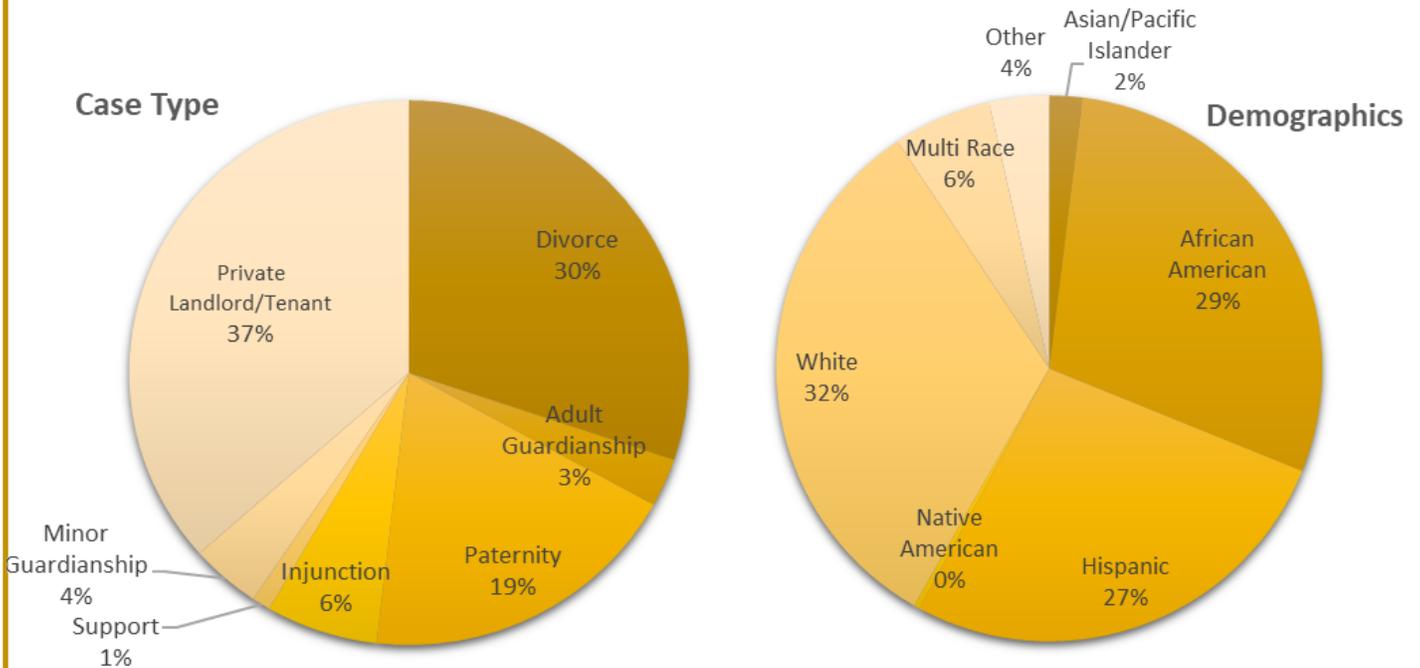
All legal services are provided in Seminole County to benefit our clients, their children and our community. We are the local legal aid program in Seminole County.

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Seminole County Legal Aid Society enjoyed working with our community of pro bono attorneys, staff attorneys, support staff, and volunteers to go above and beyond to serve those in desperate need of legal help this year. The work done by this amazing group provided much needed help for issues ranging from family law to housing to guardianships. Along with our individual client representation, we assisted with our legal outreach clinics reaching individuals, who may never have been able to seek help and gave them advice to try to get them back on their feet and prospering.

This past fiscal year, our volunteers and staff attorneys served **917 families**, including **1126 children**, with their legal needs. We obtained court orders establishing child support in the amount of **\$287,598.55** to sustain vulnerable families. Volunteer attorneys donated pro bono legal services valued at **\$262,465** and made monetary contributions of **\$31,510**. Other accomplishments are included in the following pages.

Below is charts concerning type of cases handled and demographics of our clients.



# Attainable Housing Project



Seminole County, along with the rest of the country, continues to face an affordable housing shortage. The median income in Seminole County is approximately \$39,000, while the average rental is \$1,335, which exceeds 30% of most people's income. This disparity leaves many in our community facing housing and financial instability as they try to navigate a housing market that just keeps increasing. For many in our community, homelessness is a real and very present fear. Our attainable housing legal project makes available a full range of free legal options ranging from legal advice, pro se assistance to full representation in court proceeding to assist vulnerable and low income residents of Seminole County with their housing legal issues such as evictions and unlawful detainer. The provision of these legal services helps the clients make important decisions concerning their housing to assure stability for their families.

We assisted **305 residents** of Seminole county with their serious and debilitating housing legal problems.

Please see Ronald's story below. *(Names have been changed to protect privacy).*

Ronald contacted our office because he received eviction papers from the Sheriff. He lost his job in construction after the statewide shut down in March and April, just recently was rehired, but his pay was less because his employer cut his hours. However, he stated he tried to make partial rent payments to the landlord, but they were not accepted. After talking at length with Ronald, the staff attorney agreed to represent him and started preparing the necessary paperwork.

The Staff attorney informed Ronald of the program called Seminole Cares, which assists renters in his situation, and he applied for their services. During this time, the plaintiff/landlord's attorney filed a default request in the case and in response the staff attorney filed the appropriate document to stop the default, as Ronald's case was pending approval from the Seminole County program. Fortunately, the work of the staff attorney successfully delayed the eviction and Ronald was subsequently approved and told he had received full assistance to help with his rent payments.

The plaintiff's attorney filed a dismissal of the eviction action, and Ronald is happily in his home and not homeless. Thanks to the work of Seminole County Legal Aid's staff attorney and the Seminole Cares program, Ronald was extremely grateful and relieved he will not be evicted.

# The VOCA Legal Project

One of the worst things a person can go through in their life is domestic violence. It is estimated that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men will experience domestic violence of some sort in their lifetime. Those acts create an environment that is often times nearly impossible to escape and can leave not only physical scars, but lasting emotional ones. The women and men who experience such acts and manage to reach out for help show tremendous courage and we are proud to provide the help they need to escape.

59% of our cases last year involved some kind of violence committed against our clients and we are happy to offer them free legal assistance to obtain injunctions for protection, dissolutions of marriage, child support, time sharing, and other family law matters. It is our hope that this support will allow these victims to escape the situations they find themselves in and rebuild and protect their families.

Last year, we obtained court order awards of approximately **\$287,598.55** in child support and alimony to enhance the self sufficiency of our clients and their children.



## Client Story

Daniel is currently a nineteen-year-old person within the foster-care system in Florida. By all accounts, Daniel has had a hard life. From a young age, he was neglected until he was four years old by being locked in a bedroom with his sister for much of the day. He suffered injury from lead poisoning as a young child. His mother's parental rights were terminated, and his father was incarcerated for severe physical abuse against Daniel which resulted in his parental rights being terminated.

Daniel has bounced from institution to institution and from state to state. On top of all these challenges, Daniel has a developmental disability. Although the state initially determined Daniel was eligible for "Medicaid waiver benefits," in order to assist Daniel in daily functioning, the state did a complete U-turn. Daniel was inexplicably denied eligibility.

A staff attorney from Seminole County Legal Aid represented Daniel at the "fair hearing" that challenged the state's improper reversal. At first, the state determined that the reversal was correct. The Staff attorney then appealed that decision to the Florida District Court of Appeal. The staff attorney was able to achieve a reversal of the incorrect ineligibility decision and a new fair hearing was ordered. Although the case is on-going, Seminole County Legal Aid fought for Daniel when no-one else would and his chances of receiving the Medicaid benefits to help him lead a healthy and fulfilling life were kept alive.



## Disabled Child Legal Assistance Project

As a parent, you want to protect your disabled child more than anything. When it is clear your child will never be able to care for themselves, you take the steps necessary to make sure they are as safe and as happy as they can be. That is where we come in to help the parent protect the child by establishing Guardian Advocacies for them. In this last fiscal year, we helped appoint **19 individuals** to care for their disabled children. We also helped **48 families** with Annual Guardianship Plans so that they could continue to protect their child and comply with Florida law concerning guardianships.

One such family we assisted was James and Mary. They contacted our office because their daughter, Julie is autistic and just turned 18. They wanted to obtain guardian advocacy so they could continue caring for and making decisions for their child. This was especially important because Julie has had a liver transplant and needs constant monitoring and continued doctor's visits to remain healthy. James and Mary wanted to be sure that they could still have authority to choose the medical care Julie needs.

The attorney met with the parents, and they described their daughter as a sweet young lady who enjoys learning games, copying cooking recipes and listening to music. Julie can respond verbally with single word responses and short phrases only.

The attorney immediately prepared the necessary documents and filed the documents with the court. Julie's parents were appointed guardian in little over one month. Now James and Mary can rest assured that they have the ability to make the necessary decisions regarding their daughter's well-being.



## Kinship Legal Project

Some of the most vulnerable members of our community are its children. When a child is abused or neglected by a parent, we endeavor to help grandparents and relatives who wish to protect the children assisting them to gain custody. We helped **34 families** in the last year.

An example of this type of case is Chase. As a young single man, Chase reached out to Seminole County Legal Aid because he found himself caring for his young niece and nephew. He was called by child protective services in another state who advised him that the children were removed from the mother's care due to severe neglect and abuse.

He drove and picked them up and brought them home. However, Chase had no idea how to navigate the court and be able to have the authority to make decisions on the children's care. He was approved to a staff attorney. Chase told the attorney that his sister, the children's mother, had a bad substance abuse problem and the children's father was serving 15 years in prison.

The attorney agreed to represent him and filed the necessary paperwork with the court. The Judge granted Chase custody of his niece and nephew and now he can do all the necessary things to provide a safe and stable environment for them.

# Pro Bono and Community Outreach Legal Services



Staff Paralegals, Denice Garza and Sophia Ulloa

## Veteran's Legal Project

Veterans served our nation faithfully and it is our honor to serve them in return. Every month we hold a free legal advice clinic for veterans at the Casselberry Library. In the last year, we helped **71 veterans** with issues related to family and housing.

The following volunteer attorneys participate in helping our veteran community:

Attorney Eric Boughman; Retired Judge Carmine Bravo; Attorney Christopher Butler; Attorney Karen Estray; Attorney Debra Ferwerda; Marc Jones; Sherry Lambson-Eisele; Attorney Michael Long; Attorney Carolina Nunez

An example of such assistance includes the following housing issue:

Zack and his family were at risk of being evicted. Zack is a senior citizen and a retired veteran. He lives on his Social Security retirement payments along with a small pension payment from his working years. Last month, he had a major necessary car repair that took up some of the budgeted rental payment for that month. He missed that month's rent, and his landlord started the eviction process. Zack came to Seminole County Legal Aid Society for help and a staff attorney was able to contact the landlord and negotiate a payment plan for Zack. The landlord dropped the eviction and Zack and his family were able to stay in their home. Seminole County Legal Aid Society is happy to serve a retired member of our community who served our country.



## Sealing and Expungement Workshop

We hold legal workshop classes concerning sealing and expungement of an eligible crime for residents of Seminole County, who were experiencing unemployment or credit issues. The workshops are held twice a month. An in person event is held at the Sanford Library and another workshop is held virtually. Volunteer Attorney Andrew Chmelir donates his time to assist in the monthly workshops. Each participant in the class obtains legal information and forms to assist them successfully obtain the sealing or expungement of an eligible crime. We have expanded the workshops to the Sharing Center. Volunteer attorney Erin Greene presents the workshop at the center. The classes continue to be very well received by the community, with 69 individuals who have attended the free legal classes.

# Pro Bono and Community Outreach Legal Services



Pro Bono Coordinator, Camryn Williams at the clinic

## Seminole State College Legal Clinic

This year began an exciting new outreach for Seminole County Legal Aid as we began offering Legal advice Clinics at Seminole State College (*Project Graduation*)!

College can be a confusing time for a lot of people. You are on your own for the first time in a lot of cases, with your safety net further away than it has ever been before. This leaves many young adults vulnerable, unsure where to turn when they get into trouble. Especially legal trouble. The Legal Clinic we now offer every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month now gives students a place where they can come and speak with a staff attorney about legal issues they may be having. It gives them a helping hand so that they can continue to thrive to the best of their abilities. These students are the future and we are doing what we can to ensure that that future will be bright.



## ProjectRise

Volunteer Attorney Erin Greene presenting information on sealing and expungement.

ProjectRise helps individuals experiencing financial hardship transition into economic stability through job training, job searches and stable housing. We work closely with the Sharing Center to provide monthly presentations to vulnerable adults in the areas of housing, bankruptcy and consumer law.

# Pro Bono and Community Outreach Legal Services



## Community Outreach for the elderly

Volunteer Attorney Eric Boughman presenting information on Advanced Healthcare Directives at a Senior center.

We are committed to providing services to our vulnerable senior residents. We provide community outreach events to educate them on the importance of planning for Advanced Healthcare Directives and spread the word about scams to help prevent them from being victims of financial crime.

Last year, we assisted **106 elderly** with their legal issues.

## COMMUNITY

“A small act of kindness  
can have a very large  
impact on someone else.”

# VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS

Brittany Kurland



Barry Law School

Ezequiel Vargas



Brown University

Jasmine Herring



Seminole State  
College

Kyle Flynn



FAMU Law  
School

Will Hoffman



Penn State

Robert Bressler



Retired Attorney

*thank  
you*

# PRESIDENT AWARD



**Deborah Warner**

DEBORAH WARNER is a managing partner of Warner & Warner. Debbie has served on the board of directors of the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society for numerous years. This year, Debbie served at the President of the Board of Directors. During her tenure as President, the legal aid program completed their strategic plans for future years which included the upgrade of board room technology, the addition of new remote phone system and revised and update our human resource policies. Debbie generously donates her time and legal talents to enhance our program's abilities to better serve the underprivileged residents of Seminole County with their urgent legal issues.

# PRO BONO ATTORNEY OF THE YEAR



**Andrew Chmelir**

Andrew Chmelir is a partner in the law firm of Jacobson, Chmelir & Ferwerda. He has been a lawyer for over 26 years and practices primarily in the areas of family and criminal law at both the trial and appellate levels. Mr. Chmelir has been assisting the Seminole County Legal Aid office with numerous pro-bono cases for many years. He has been instrumental in revising our the Sealing and Expungement workshops to both an in-person workshop at the Sanford Library and a virtual legal workshop every month. Attorney Chmelir generously donates his time and legal talents to assist individuals, who are struggling to find employment due to an unfavorable criminal history. With his help, the individuals are able to seal or expunge an eligible crime which prevents them from becoming self supporting. He is also active in the Guardian Ad Litem program.

# PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD



**Eric Boughman**

Eric Boughman is an AV-Rated Attorney and Certified Mediator, and Co-Founder of ForsterBoughman, a business boutique law firm. He enjoys resolving sometimes complex legal issues and disputes for a wide range of businesses, business owners, investors, and entrepreneurs in industries ranging from healthcare, technology, real estate, and others. He began his legal career in Las Vegas, NV (where he is still licensed) but has practiced most of his career in Central Florida. Eric is a dedicated husband, father, animal lover, and community servant. He is a long-time volunteer consultant for Franklins Friends, a local animal welfare organization, past President of the Rotary Club of Lake Mary, current District General Counsel for the Central Florida Rotary District, and frequent volunteer at his kids' school. Eric is a US Air Force Veteran and has enjoyed the opportunity to help other vets through the SCBA Legal Aid program. In spare time, he enjoys staying physically and mentally active.



**Karl Burgunder**

Karl Burgunder began practicing law in Seminole County in 1994. His Oviedo-based practice is focused primarily on representing individual and business clients in the areas of business law, commercial and real property transactions, wills and trusts, and estate and trust administration. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Go Steelers!), in 1980 Karl moved to Merritt Island, Florida where he met his future wife Sheila. Prior to law school, Karl worked as a bank credit analyst, but also knows way more about plumbing than most people would guess. He earned both his undergraduate (finance) and law degrees from the University of Florida (Go Gators!) In law school, he was a member of the moot court board and was involved in student government. As a firm believer in the importance of, and duty to, give back to the community, Karl is a long-time member of the Rotary Club of Oviedo, where he served twice as its President. The Rotary International motto of "Service above Self" particularly resonates. Karl and Sheila are the proud parents of two adult children: Mitchell, of Melbourne, FL and Allison, of New York City. In his spare time, Karl enjoys all varieties of reading, boating, movies, and the Great American Road Trip. He assists in the housing legal project with our program.

# PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD



**Erin Greene**

Attorney Greene was born and raised in Seminole County, Florida. After graduating from Lake Mary High School in 1990, she began her college education at the University of Florida and graduated in 1994 with a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology/Criminal Justice with honors. In 1995 she attended law school at the University of Florida and graduated in 1997 with honors. Her legal career began in 1997 at the Public Defender's Office in Seminole County. She stayed there a year then opened my own practice in Sanford in 1998. After she had my first child, she joined an insurance defense firm in downtown Orlando where she handled governmental immunity cases. In 2008, she returned to private practice in Sanford. Throughout her career in private practice, she have specialized in the areas of bankruptcy, probate, family law, and estate planning. She is also a Certified Mediator in both Dependency and Circuit Court. She assists our program with projectRISE and sealing and sealing and expungement workshops.



**Jonathan Paul**

Jonathan Paul, of Weissman Paul, PLLC, is an Altamonte Springs based attorney who practices in the areas of estate planning, probate, and civil litigation (business and real estate matters primarily). Jonathan went to Lake Brantley High School, University of Florida, and Florida State University College of Law. Jonathan returned to Central Florida after law school, and has been proud to continue to practicing primarily in the region. Being a longtime resident of Seminole and Orange Counties, Jonathan believes in doing what he can to give back to the communities that have given him so much in the way of education and support. Attorney Paul assists our program in the housing legal project.

"Do not act as if you were going to live ten thousand years....While you live, while it is in your power, be good."  
Marcus Aurelius, Meditations.

# PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD



**Mandy Pavlakos**

Even as an undergrad attending the University of Central Florida, Mandy Pavlakos felt compelled to fight for the underdog. She took it upon herself to further her fight for those in need by attending Florida A & M Law School and upon graduation opened her Central Florida practice in 2006. Mandy Pavlakos has since dedicated her life and law practice to helping the residents of Seminole County with their legal needs. She served on the Board of Directors of the Rescue Outreach Mission, Seminole County's only homeless shelter, for over ten years. While she is no longer on the Board, she has maintained her goal to help end homelessness in Seminole County. She also takes pride in assisting the Seminole County Bar Association's Legal Aid Society's Pro Bono program and assisting any clients they refer to her. The Law Office of Mandy Pavlakos, P.A. helps families in their times of financial distress, some of whom are faced with the possibility of losing their home. Whether fighting a wrongful foreclosure, helping someone save their home, or simply fighting for justice for those who would otherwise be denied legal help, Attorney Pavlakos strives to ensure her clients and the community have a fair and equitable chance at finding help when they need it most. She assists our program with the housing legal project.



**Jack Taylor**

Jack Taylor is a construction and real property litigation attorney in Central Florida. During his time as an attorney, he has successfully argued contested motions in circuit and county courts throughout Florida, and negotiated advantageous settlement agreements in a number of cases. Mr. Taylor has drafted numerous complaints, motions, interrogatories, requests for admissions, requests for production, replies, responses, and other pleadings and court filings. An experienced litigator, Mr. Taylor has provided courtroom representation in dozens of Florida county and circuit court cases. His hearing and trial representation includes the areas of Construction Disputes, Landlord/Tenant, Code Violations, and Consumer Collections. Mr. Taylor has spent many hours in the courtroom, not to mention achieving successful outcomes in court ordered mediations. He assists our program with the housing legal project.

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” MOTHER TERESA

# COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD

## The Sharing Center



We work with the Sharing Center on their new project. ProjectRISE (Reach, Inspire, Sustain, and Empower) will help individuals experiencing financial hardship transition into economic stability through job training, job searches and stable housing. It is anticipated to lift family members out of poverty through a newly launched program, a workforce development program for individuals and their families to gain skillful employment, financial freedom, and housing stability

**THE GREATNESS OF A COMMUNITY  
IS MOST ACCURATELY MEASURED  
BY THE COMPASSIONATE ACTIONS  
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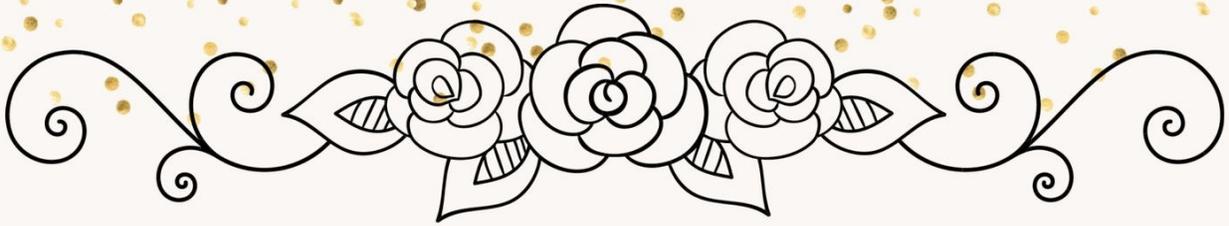
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*"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision... It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."*

*Thank You!*

*With great appreciation to the gifted staff, generous pro-bono attorneys and big-hearted volunteers of the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society.*

*Nancy S. Freeman, P.A.*

*Nancy Freeman*

*Marla Schaffer*



**Alone we can do  
so little;  
together we can  
do so much**

**-Helen Keller**



Thank you to our board of directors,  
pro bono attorneys, volunteer students, talented staff,  
donors and supporters

**-Silvia McLain**

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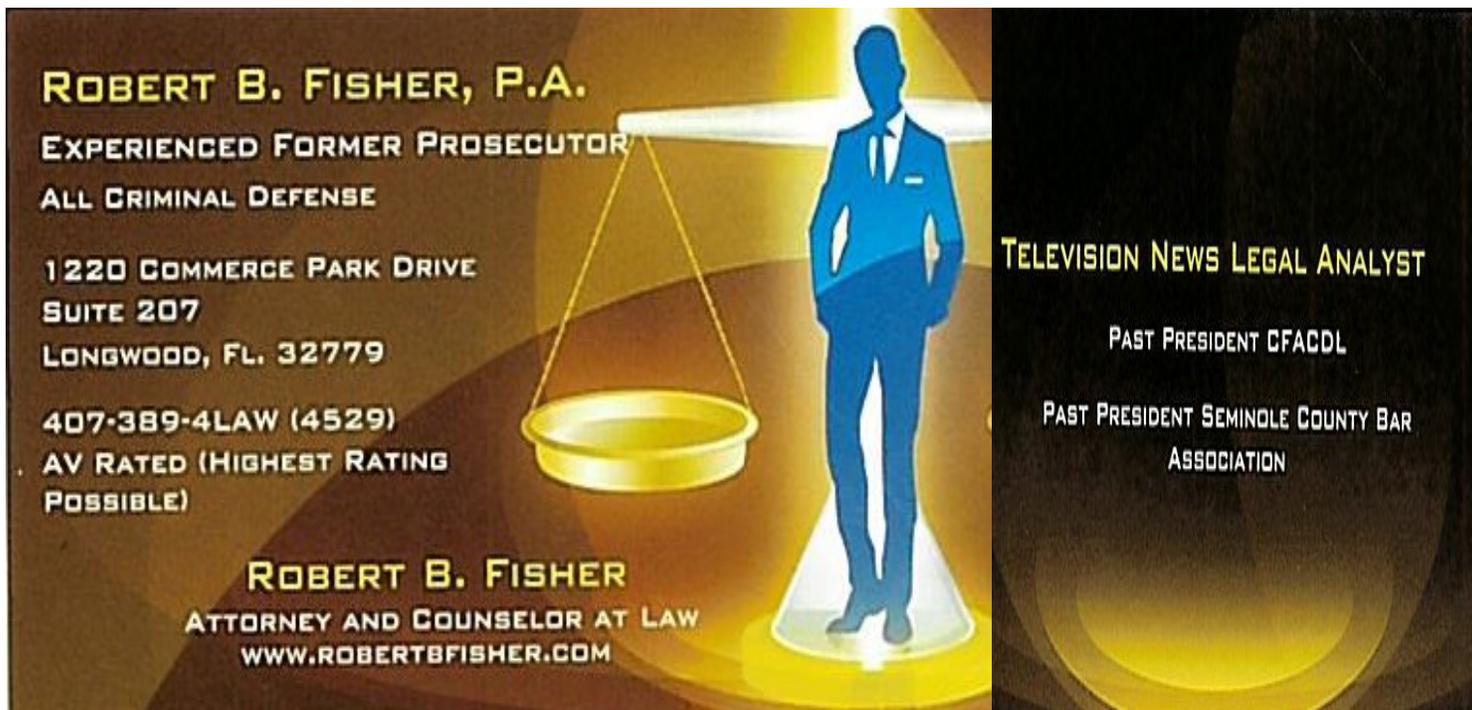
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**BOUNDS** LAW GROUP

**“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing”**

Each of us has a responsibility to help those in need, to act and to take up just causes. We each see injustice every day and yet, we don't always act. We see darkness forming and yet we don't always act. We see faith fading, yet we don't always act. Bounds Law Group pledges to act by and through its skill, its time and its resources, to find a more just world. We invite you to join us in taking action, be it through support of the Seminole County Legal Aid Society, marching in solidarity with those who are facing economic hardship, domestic violence and homelessness.

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