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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Monica Beck ('02/Antitrust/NY), a litigator with The Fierberg National Law Group in Traverse City, Michigan, represents students in kindergarten through high school who have suffered sexual assault, sexual harassment, severe hazing or other violence.

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Monica Beck

December 7, 2017

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You've been with **The Fierberg National Law Group** since 2014. Tell us about what you do and the types of cases you typically handle.

My work focuses on bringing civil claims on behalf of students in kindergarten through high school who have suffered sexual assault, sexual harassment, severe hazing or other violence. For example, in October of this year I **secured a \$1.8 million verdict** for a 16-year-old high school student who was sexually abused by a 40-year-old substitute teacher and school volunteer, the former professional baseball player Chad Curtis. I'm currently **representing a student in Virginia** who, as a third and fourth grader, was severely sexually abused by the school janitor — we've brought Title IX and other federal civil rights and state claims against the perpetrator and the school system. I also have a case pending in Tennessee, where I represent a high school student who was hazed and sodomized by teammates on the school's varsity basketball team. We've filed Title IX and other federal and state claims against the school district and several of its employees.

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I hope that my work achieves justice for my clients and serves as a stark warning to perpetrators and school officials who ignore their federally mandated duties to protect students that they will be held responsible for their actions, not only through criminal prosecution, but also in the civil legal system.

How did your time at Skadden lead to this work?

As an antitrust associate, I worked on both transactional and litigation matters, which allowed me to discover my passion for litigation. That came as a bit of a surprise, as it hadn't particularly interested me in law school. The firm's *pro bono* program also

provided me with the opportunity to help domestic abuse survivors obtain lawful permanent residence, which strengthened my interest in transitioning to a position championing the most vulnerable and provided me with the necessary experience to do so.

In 2011, after nine years at Skadden, I became the deputy general counsel for Phoenix House Foundation, the nation's largest nonprofit dedicated to substance abuse treatment and prevention. I oversaw all litigation brought by and against the organization. However, I missed being the attorney "on the ground," and I wanted to return to my home state of Michigan. In 2013, I moved back, and after a short stint at a small plaintiff's personal injury firm, I found my current position at Fierberg. Four years later, I still consider this my dream job.

How has your field evolved in recent years? And how have changes in laws and attitudes relating to sexual harassment and discrimination impacted your work?

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The field is changing pretty rapidly, as it's a fairly new area of law. A large part of my work falls under Title IX, which bars sexual discrimination in schools. It wasn't until 1992 that the Supreme Court held that schools that receive federal funding can be held civilly liable for monetary damages if they violate Title IX's requirements by failing to properly respond to reports of sexual harassment or failing to remedy hostile educational environments. The relevant case law is quickly developing, and I am very proud to be able to help set legal precedent in some states and federal districts that is beneficial to survivors.

In addition, it's only in the last decade or so that people have started to become aware of the pervasiveness of sexual assault and harassment in schools, particularly involving students from kindergarten through 12th grade. And, while Title IX's protections have become well-known at universities, people are less aware that it applies to K-through-12 schools as well. One of the most important trends in my work is that public elementary, middle and high schools are becoming more aware of their responsibilities. I'm hoping to make them even more aware.

Have the recent high-profile sexual assault and harassment cases impacted your work?

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It's too soon to know what the ultimate impact of this attention will be, but my hope is that these cases will encourage more young people to report what happens to them. The prevalence of student-against-student and educator-against-student sexual violence in primary and secondary schools is astonishing, and when students come forward, they're often bullied and vilified. I hope that Harvey Weinstein and the "me too" campaign will lead to greater understanding, facilitating a discussion and encouraging people to show compassion to those who report they have been sexually harassed or assaulted.

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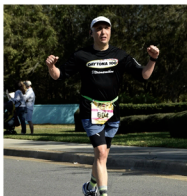


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Judge Bentley Kassal Shares His Eight Decades of Legal Experience

Judge Bentley Kassal, who celebrated his 100th birthday in February, continues to share his experience with his Skadden litigation colleagues.



Mike Freed

Mike Freed ('93/DC/Energy) runs six marathons in six days to support Jacksonville Area Legal Aid.

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