



CLC STAFF

Justine Rakich-Kelly,
Executive Director

Randa Hojaiban,
Deputy Director

Deb Shulansky,
Director of Development

Margaret Bozek,
Staff Attorney & Program Liaison

David Coughlin,
Staff Attorney

Victoria Hotham,
Professional Assistant

Nilda Negrón,
Staff Attorney

Alex Puzone,
Staff Attorney

Aisha Roche,
Staff Attorney

Monique Ryan,
Staff Attorney

Nicole Silva,
Staff Social Worker

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Laura Post, *President*

Pamela Magnano, *Vice President*

Jonathan Fink, *Treasurer*

Cara Hardacker, *Secretary*

Melissa Arkus

Peggy Boissoneau

Dan A. Brody

Carolyn Fink

Patricia Pheanious

Patrick Proctor

Rashani Swaby

Elizabeth Thayer

Tim Buckley,
Immediate Past President

THE CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER OF CONNECTICUT

30 Arbor Street, Suite 208
Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 232-9993
www.clcct.org

SUPPORT OUR WORK
www.clcct.org/support



Brendan Holt

Quinnipiac Law Student Volunteers Make a Great FIT

The Children's LAW Center's Families in Transition (FIT) program provides a mediation opportunity for parents trying to work out their disputes outside of court. Participants are paired with a volunteer team that is familiar with the family court process.

Brendan C. Holt, Esq. is involved in private practice with Holt Law, LLC. He also works with a state-funded mediation clinic handling employment discrimination and COVID-related home eviction cases. Brendan additionally is an Adjunct Professor at Quinnipiac University School of Law (QUSL). This past fall, he and some of his QUSL students studying Family Law began working as volunteers for the FIT program.

Mediation sessions are held virtually and statewide. Brendan conducts the sessions with two student mediators present, and

CLC always asks the parents if they are OK having student mediators participate. Students can play a role based on their comfort level. Brendan provides summaries of the mediation meetings to the parents and to CLC. This creates a roadmap for the mediation process in each case.

Mediation is about developing a neutral voice, assisting people in a tough spot, and encouraging them to feel heard. For some parents, it's hard for them to hear each other. Life is dynamic with young children. A goal of mediation is clarifying what is really going on, connecting the dots, and helping people re-engage with one another. Articulating that they feel open to a solution is a powerful thing. The most powerful part is when the mediation reaches an end-point leading to an agreement or hearing. *continued on page 2*

Quinnipiac Law Student Volunteers Make a Great FIT

continued from page 1

Brendan reflected on how this experience can be beneficial to both parents and students:

Our first experience volunteering for CLC's family-related mediation program was a case with conflict over custody, visitation, and parenting issues. For our students, it's important that they have opportunities to learn how to deal with conflict and emotional situations. Many students have already had an internship working with an established firm, court-ordered and litigation-based cases, and clients that can afford assistance. For some, this is their first interaction with real-world clients. The students are helping people in tough spots and difficult situations and they're learning how to manage conflict and facilitate resolution.

We are still working with the first case, and now are on our sixth meeting with

the parents. We have three other cases this semester that are now in second sessions. We start by letting the parents know that they don't have to fix this in an hour-and-a-half. For the mediators, it begins with earning trust from the parents, figuring out their dynamics, and not telling them what to do. There is no one definition of success. For some parents, it's a small rough patch; for others, it's a continuing process. That's what's great about mediation; there is no forced timeline.

The first meetings are unique due to different parent dynamics. Some are cathartic, others are pragmatic. We want to make it comfortable and a good experience for the parents.

For the students, it broadens their skills in listening, communicating with clients, problem solving, and helping people with their legal problems and the litigation process.

CLC is extremely grateful to Brendan, his students and the Quinnipiac University School of Law for their volunteer participation in the FIT program.

Mediation helps children by lessening the conflict in their lives. We are committed to protecting children from the harm caused by high-conflict custody and visitation disputes. Successful mediation can take the conflict out of family court proceedings and reduce the stress of repeated court appearances.

To be eligible, parents must be of low or moderate income and be willing to participate in and cooperate with the mediation process. Our service is based on a sliding fee scale. For more information, please contact Nicole Silva, LCSW at 860-232-9993 x312 or nicole@clcct.org. ♥



The Children's Law Center is excited to announce our fundraising partnership with the 2022 Travelers Championship Birdies for Charity program!

Once again, the Travelers Championship will donate 100% of your gift to our organization, PLUS provide an additional 15% bonus match on every dollar raised!

CLC's fundraising theme this year is "Families Growing Stronger." Your donation will enable us to continue the vital work of protecting children and strengthening families in crisis. We appreciate your support, as it is crucial to our success. Thank you.

How to Donate Through Birdies for Charity:

- Visit our website at www.clcct.org and click on the Birdies for Charity image on the home page.
- If you would prefer to receive a donation form with instructions for mailing a check directly to Travelers Championship that will designate your gift to CLC, please email clc@clcct.org. ♥



Pictured left-to-right are: David Griffin, AAML Foundation Board Member and Attorney with Rutkin Oldham Griffin; Nilda Negron, CLC Staff Attorney; and Justine Rakich-Kelly, CLC Executive Director.

CLC Receives AAML Foundation Grant

Thank you to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers Foundation (AAML Foundation) for making a grant award of \$5,000 to The Children's LAW Center. In presenting the check, Griffin said, "This grant will help to support a hard-working group of attorneys and professionals who are at work daily, in the trenches, helping children in need of top-notch legal services. It pleases me to no end that we have provided this support to such a worthy organization." ♥

Meet Our New Staff Attorney, Nilda Negrón

What is your role and primary responsibilities at CLC?

I am a Staff Attorney and represent children in my role as a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). My primary responsibilities are to advocate and provide a voice for the child in turbulent family disputes. I begin by establishing a trusting relationship with the child and investigating all issues relevant in a custody, divorce, or visitation matter. I like to say that I represent those who cannot represent themselves. I am their voice and advocate for their views, safety, and what is best for them.

What is your legal background and experience before joining CLC?

For the last 10 years, I have done general litigation with a primary focus on juvenile and probate cases. I handled multiple cases in guardianship, neglect, termination of parental rights, special juvenile immigration status, and emancipation cases. I represented the children or the indigent parents. In addition, I also handled bankruptcy cases, real estate cases, and some family cases. Previously, I worked as Staff Attorney for an insurance company and for the federal government.

How did you first learn about CLC?

I learned about The Children's LAW Center when I was doing some GAL work at family court, and through other attorneys who raved about the Families in Transition program and other programs at CLC.

In your experience, how has CLC helped improve the lives of children and families?

Resolving issues with parents and helping them understand how their conflicts are affecting their children helps them to turn their focus once again on their child. For example, I had a case where the child was 4 years old, could not speak except to say 'Mama,' and was very hyperactive. The parents thought it was a normal delay in his childhood development. I worked with the parents to get them engaged and suggested they bring him to the pediatrician to get an assessment. The mother understood and joined me in calling the pediatrician, school counselor and a therapist to discuss the matter. She also became more involved in encouraging her child to visit with his dad, even when the child did not want to go.

What should we know about Nilda?

I am fluent in Spanish and able to assist and orient my Spanish-speaking clients



Nilda (right) and her daughter, Nata.

during the entire custody/visitation process. I love the UConn Huskies, especially the women's basketball team. They are exemplary and an inspiration to all girls in America. When I was in middle and high school, I played on the volleyball, softball, and basketball teams. Currently I enjoy hiking. I love to travel with my extensive family, and our family trips have been to Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Key West and a cruise to Honduras. I have also been to China, Spain, Kenya, Portugal and Morocco.

Anything else you would like to share?

I believe that the true measure of success for an agency starts at the top. Our Executive Director, Justine Rakich-Kelly, sets the tone. She expects nothing but 100%, pushes us to do our best, and is always extremely focused on the children. My fellow staff members and colleagues are superb. CLC has a family atmosphere and we work well together. I am proud to be part of such a talented team. ♥



Save the Date for our Annual Gala! Thursday, October 13, 2022

Please join us to celebrate our supporters. Spectacular fall foliage will be our backdrop as we gather mostly outdoors, under a spacious tent.

Farmington Gardens

999 Farmington Avenue (Rte. 4), Farmington, CT

5:30PM - 8:30PM

STAY TUNED:

- Look for more information on our website, www.clcct.org, or follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter! @childrenslawct #childrenslawct
- For sponsorship opportunities and auction item donations, please email Gala@clcct.org or call 860-232-9993.

Meet Laura Post, CLC's new President of the Board of Directors



Laura Post was first introduced to The Children's LAW Center by CLC's Immediate Past President of the Board, Tim Buckley. "Tim and I have been friends and neighbors for 27 years. He lives three houses away and our daughters have been best friends since age five. So when I mentioned to Tim that I was looking for an opportunity to volunteer

and get involved with a local nonprofit, he recruited me to CLC. I joined the Gala Committee in 2015, where I served for a few years and then was asked to join the Board." In October 2021, CLC welcomed Laura as the newest President of the Board.

Laura's background and experience make her an excellent person to lead CLC's Board. As a Management Consultant with Fio Partners LLC based in Cheshire, Laura helps support nonprofit executives and boards of directors with strategic planning to set future direction and identify growth. Fio's clients include social services, advocacy, workforce development, childcare, and diversity/equity training organizations. Prior to joining Fio, Laura was Vice President of Global Insights at the LEGO Group, where she worked for nearly 30 years in marketing and strategic planning.

After college, Laura stayed in Connecticut to take a job as a reporter with the Manchester Journal-Inquirer (her first career). She met her husband, Mark Pazniokas (also a J-I reporter and currently Capitol Bureau Chief and co-founder of the Connecticut Mirror), during her job interview. "I locked my keys

in the car and instead of calling a locksmith, the editor sent Mark out with a coat hanger. Although it wasn't quite love at first sight, I got my first job and met my future husband that day!"

Laura has served as a board member and staff consultant for the LEGO Community Fund U.S., the LEGO Group's local foundation, and was a gubernatorial appointee to the State of Connecticut's Early Childhood Cabinet. She is also a board member of the Connecticut Women's Council, a professional women's network. She was born and raised on Long Island, NY and has a BA in Russian and Soviet Studies from Cornell University, and an MBA from the University of Connecticut.

"Like LEGO, CLC is mission-driven with a focus on building the future for children. There is common ground in making things better for kids. So, CLC's work resonates with my experience, although I'm not an attorney. The compelling care and empathy the staff has for children is incredible. And it's a great Board - our members engage actively, and they are patient and passionate people."

While serving on CLC's Board, Laura helped develop CLC's current strategic plan that was adopted in 2018. "I now look forward to continuing to help CLC build from a position of strength. We have capacity for growth in programs and services. This includes taking on more cases with families that have modest means of payment; building our Streamlined Family Collaborative Law Program that offers a less challenging, less expensive divorce or separation process; and increasing the diversity and strength of our funding resources. I am fortunate for this opportunity to be involved with CLC."

Laura and Mark live in West Hartford. They are the parents of two adult daughters and the grandparents of a 20-month-old grandson. Laura is passionate about travelling and practicing her language fluency, including "a little Russian, Spanish and Chinese." ♥

Wine, Women & Fashion event was a great success!

Thank you to BK&Co. for hosting this event!

Thank you to Barbara and Karen of BK&Co. in West Hartford for hosting Wine, Women & Fashion on April 26! 20% of customers' purchases were donated through the Travelers Championship Birdies for Charity program to support The Children's LAW Center of Connecticut, and so will be matched with another 15%! ♥



Pictured L-R: Karen Herbert (co-owner of BK & Co), Karen Tomasko, Justine Rakich-Kelly, Laura Post, Barbara Aaron, Barbara Karsky (co-owner of BK & Co).



Other Ways to Support CLC

Families

GROWING STRONGER

AMAZON SMILE

Simply select CLC as your nonprofit of choice and shop www.smile.amazon.com

MATCHING GIFTS

Many employers encourage giving by offering matching gift options. Ask your employer about this easy way to grow your donation.

BEQUESTS

Consider a legacy gift. For information, contact Deb at Deb@clcct.org