

DAILY REPORT

IN SERVICE

These essays are written in collaboration with the Atlanta Bar Association, the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation, Atlanta Legal Aid, Georgia Legal Services Program and others. To submit your own essay, contact Jonathan Ringel, managing editor, at jringel@alm.com.



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Big Part of Volunteer Lawyers' Role is Supporting Seekers of Protective Orders

BY DANIELLE BARAV-JOHNSON
AND KAELEY RUSSO

OUR CLIENT'S HANDS shook as she held her phone to the courtroom microphone to play, for all to hear, a voicemail left by her ex-boyfriend. That voicemail demonstrated the fear and emotional pain he had caused her over the course of their relationship and after they were no longer together. It was clearly very difficult for her to listen to the insults directed toward her in the voicemail. When her shaking hands accidentally stopped the playback of the recording, the entire courtroom seemed to feel her pain as she had to replay the message from the beginning.

As we represented our client in her effort to secure a temporary protective order against her former partner on behalf of herself and her children, including a child fathered by him, we were struck by the incredible amount of courage that was necessary to navigate this legal process. Our client had suffered years of physical and verbal abuse by her ex-boyfriend. Her children had also been victims of his violent temper. After trying various other ways to distance herself and her family from him, and despite the risk of reprisal she faced, our client turned to the court for more-lasting protection for her children and for herself.

As part of the process of securing a year-long protective order, our client, much like other petitioners in similar situations, had to share some of her most personal and most painful experiences with a courtroom full of strangers. As we spoke with our client prior to the hearing, we noticed how difficult it was for her to describe the incidents of domestic violence that she had suffered. We knew that one of the most important ways we could help our client was to be her voice and her emotional support during this proceeding.

Because the process of seeking a temporary protective order can be so emotionally

difficult, it was very important to our client and to us to know that there were sources of support available. Particularly valuable was the support we received from the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation (AVLF). When our client decided to take her first step toward legal protective action, she visited the AVLF Safe Families Office in the Fulton County Courthouse. With AVLF's assistance, she secured an ex parte order that gave her immediate protection from her ex-boyfriend for 30 days. AVLF then referred her case to Jones Day. AVLF remained closely involved by providing specific training and materials on the legal landscape and the results of AVLF's experiences with clients in similar situations. Throughout our representation, the lawyers at AVLF remained available to answer questions and offer guidance, making them an invaluable resource both to us and to our client.

Ultimately, our client's courageous efforts paid off. The court awarded her and her children a one-year protective order against her former partner and affirmed our client's custody rights over the child

fathered by him. In addition, our client received information about resources for long-term support of her family.

We are grateful for the opportunity AVLF gave us to represent our client in this case, and are honored to have helped our client obtain this protection. Further, we walk away from this experience with renewed respect and appreciation for the importance of our role as advocates to support our clients emotionally and to be sensitive to the difficulty they may face in sharing their stories and navigating the legal process. 

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