

LAW MATTERS

June 2025

Volume XXXVIII No. 1



DOT DOBBINS

JULY 17, 1947 - JUNE 8, 2025

LAW FOUNDER, PAST PRESIDENT AND DEVOTED MEMBER

In This Issue

President's Message	2
Results of Member Survey	3
Mentoring and Membership Development Article	4
Recap of May Membership Meeting	5
Recap of Legislative Update	6-7
Board Member Spotlight	8
New Member Spotlight	9-10
Culinary Docket	11
Venice and the Ottoman Empire Exhibit	12
Women's Symposium	13-14
Honoring Dot Dobbins	15
Sustaining Members	16
Annual Sponsors	17
INSBANK Philanthropic Account	18

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: LEIGHANN NESS



On April 24, 2025, we celebrated our incredible award recipients at the LAW Annual Awards Banquet. Princess Rogers (Rising Star Award), Jackie Dixon (Martha Craig Daughtrey Award), and Ava Dakash (essay contest winner), truly stand out. I'm proud to be part of an organization that recognizes and uplifts those who go above and beyond—not just in their service to the bar, but in their efforts to elevate other women in the profession.

We celebrated Courtney Orr as well for her outstanding leadership last year. She accomplished quite a bit, including finalizing a joint membership option with the Napier Looby Bar Association. Quite impressive! Steering a small but mighty organization like LAW is no small feat. It

requires a dedicated leader and a strong, active board. I'm honored to step into this role and excited for the year ahead.

LAW's mission is to advocate for women in the legal profession, encourage leadership and professional development, support justice, and serve our community. While women now make up over half of law school classes, we still see far fewer women in top leadership positions, like managing partners at firms. That's why our work remains so important. LAW has been instrumental over the past 44 years in increasing the number of women on the bench and building a strong network of support for those striving to lead. But there is always room for improvement!

I am genuinely excited for what's to come. We have a dynamic and motivated board this year, and I have already heard some fantastic ideas—on growing our membership, on offering high-quality CLEs, and on creating more ways for us to connect.

I want to specifically mention the Symposium planning committee. They have laid the foundation for a great event coming up on September 18th. It will be a half-day program at the Nashville City Club and will feature Helen Wan, author of *The Partner Track*, which was adapted into a Netflix series. We are also planning some exciting breakout sessions, so mark your calendars and stay tuned!

But don't wait until September to get involved! As with most things in life, you get out what you put in. I encourage you to make LAW events part of how you care for yourself this year—whether that is attending a CLE lunch, joining the book club, or participating in a wellness event. Spending time with others who share your passion and purpose is a powerful way to reset, recharge, and grow!

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LAW Matters is a bi-monthly publication of the Lawyers' Association for Women—Marion Griffin Chapter, P. O. Box 150532, Nashville, Tennessee, 37215; 615.428.6657; www.law-nashville.org.

You spoke up! And, We're Listening!!!

by Leighann Ness, President of LAW and Senior Operations Counsel, HCA Healthcare

Many thanks to all who participated in our 2025 – 2026 Member Survey over the last month! We had almost a 27% response rate, which is good for an online survey, and we gathered lots of great information to help us steer in the direction of what you all would like to see. We've already implemented some changes!

Here are some things we heard from you:

- You have tons of professional experience! What an impressive group with over 35% having practiced law for over 25 years! What a treasure trove of leaders we have!!
- The top three most important aspects of your membership are networking and professional connections, events and social gatherings, and access to the judiciary and legal community.
- Location, time of day, and topic are the top drivers of event attendance.
- Networking is the top initiative that would increase your engagement with LAW.
- Wednesday, Tuesday, and Thursday (in that order, although it's practically a 3-way tie) are your best days of the week to attend events. And lunchtime or happy hour work best.
- Our largest contingencies in terms of neighborhoods are Downtown, West End/Midtown/Vandy, and the Nations/Sylvan Park/West Nashville.
- You want more event options, both in person and virtual.
- You want small-group connection opportunities.

Stay tuned as we work towards more options that align with what you want!! For now, we want to share the following:

- Come network with us for FREE!!!! Members are welcome to attend membership CLE meetings for FREE if you forego the CLE credit and the meal. We have added this option to event registrations on our website. So, please come join us!
- The Member Development and Mentorship Committee Co-Chairs are organizing small group meetups. Check the Upcoming Events sections of this newsletter and www.law-nashville.org. More information is forthcoming!
- We are working through options for providing more virtual content and meeting opportunities.
- If you have any suggestions for us or want to join the Networking, Membership, or Member Development and Mentorship Committees to help organize events, please reach out to me. Many hands make light work!

Thanks again for sharing your thoughts. We are excited for the year to come!

Hello from the Mentoring and Member Development Committee, Erika Stinnett and Stephanie Gibbs!

by Stephanie Gibbs and Erika Stinnett

We're listening! Several of you in the Member Survey asked for more networking and mentorship opportunities, so, we've created some exciting options for you!

First up, we are kicking off an opportunity for mentors and mentees to be matched in deeply enriching mentorship pairs.

To participate as a mentor or mentee, please check out the link to an enrollment form in the last weekly email blast. We will match mentors and mentees based on responses and preferences. Please provide your survey responses by July 31.

And, as a sneak peek, please look for more details soon on these upcoming events:

- Four to six mentor/mentee meet-ups this year, such as lunches and happy hours
- Mixer with a local law school
- Speed networking event in November with new admittees

We also have a development opportunity launching now – life and leadership coaching. With so much happening in the world, in your communities, and in your careers, coaching is an opportunity to slow down, get in touch with yourself, and invite what might want to emerge in your life and career.

Stephanie is offering 3 pro bono coaching sessions for 10 individuals curious about coaching. If you're interested in scheduling a coaching session, please reach out to Stephanie at seastephele@gmail.com.

For those new to coaching, a coach can help you uncover inner wisdom by asking thoughtful questions and gently challenging you. You choose your own goals and what matters most to you when you work with your coach.

Coaching can help you:

- Better understand yourself
- Get clear on your purpose
- Make sure your actions and mindset match your goals
- Create a plan and stay on track for long-term success and fulfillment

Coaching differs from mentorship in that mentors can offer guidance and advice based on deep career and life experiences, while coaches can guide you to make shifts within yourself to uncover resources and solutions – both mentorship and coaching are valuable tools for your career and life toolboxes. You can still sign up for coaching sessions even if you're planning to be a mentor or mentee.

We look forward to the year ahead! Please reach out to Erika or Stephanie with any questions or ideas to advance the mentorship and member development activities.

Erika is a second-year Corporate M&A associate with Polsinelli PC and a graduate of Michigan State University (B.A.) and the University of Tennessee (JD). Prior to law school, Erika was a paralegal in a small firm handling primarily commercial litigation matters. In her free time, Erika enjoys exploring and learning new hobbies such as bowling, pool, knitting, and golf. Erika is looking forward to connecting with LAW members as she continues to get to know the Nashville community.

Stephanie is a health policy consultant and life and leadership coach. She is currently serving as a state advisor for a federally funded project supporting states in aging and disability initiatives. She is a graduate of the University of Tennessee (B.A.) and the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law, University of Memphis (JD). She completed the Executive Certificate in Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy School and the e-Co Coaching program at George Washington University. She was a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Fellow and served as a fellow in the U.S. Senate. She enjoys hiking, kayaking, photography, and chasing her rescue beagle, Duncan.

RECAP OF MAY MEMEBERSHIP MEETING, LAW'S BOOK CLUB ON VALLEY SO LOW

by Janna Eaton Smith, Executive Director of LAW

At our May membership meeting held at the Café at Thistle Farms, LAW held a book club with author Jared Sullivan about his book, *Valley So Low*, which tells the story of the 2008 Kingston Fossil Plant coal ash spill in Tennessee and the subsequent legal battle for justice on behalf of the affected workers. The book details the disaster, the cleanup efforts, and the fight led by lawyer Jim Scott against the Tennessee Valley Authority. It explores the human cost of the disaster, the challenges faced by the workers, and the complexities of holding a large entity accountable for environmental and health consequences.

Jared talked about the history of TVA and how the coal ash disaster was allowed to happen. The Kingston Fossil Plant was the world's largest coal-fired power station. Every day the plant burned enough coal to power 700,000 homes and produce a thousand tons of ash. The TVA dumped much of that ash into a series of ponds and, over decades, it broadened into a gigantic dike of coal slurry covering 84 acres. On December 22, 2008, the dike collapsed. 1.1 billion gallons of poisonous sludge buried homes and filled waterways. By volume, it was the largest industrial disaster in U.S. history, a hundred times the scale of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. But for years, most of its victims believed themselves unharmed since TVA told them that the coal ash was harmless. Incriminating air-monitoring data was manipulated or tossed out. It was later learned that the Kingston ash was not only toxic but also radioactive. Several of the employees of an engineering firm hired by TVA to clean up the spill developed illnesses, including brain cancer, lung cancer, and leukemia, as a result of exposure to the toxic coal ash and 30 people had died within 10 years of the spill.

Jared explained that he got the idea for the book when he was working as an editor for Men's Health in New York. He would often keep an eye out for news from the South. He grew up in Franklin and his sister lives in Knoxville. He remembered the coverage from the coal ash spill and TVA's story that the coal ash was not hazardous. Based on the economy melting down in 2008, the story quickly faded from the news headlines. In 2018, Jared began researching for the book, finding much of his data at the National Archives. During the pandemic, Jared moved back home to Tennessee to work on his book. In May of 2023, a settlement was reached in the lawsuit filed by workers against the contractor hired by TVA to clean up the coal ash spill. Jared published his book the following year in 2024. This was his first event with lawyers as the audience since he normally speaks to environmental groups. Victoria Gentry moderated the discussion, asking thoughtful questions along the way. Jared was assured by the LAW audience that his description of the legal drama was accurate. The audience engaged in a thoughtful discussion with Jared and LAW felt honored to have him participate in our book club.



LAW 2025 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

JUNE 23, 2025, 11:30-1:00
NASHVILLE SCHOOL OF LAW



Annual Legislative Update: June Membership Meeting

by Jorie Zajicek

At the June 23, 2025 Legislative Update, LAW hosted panelists Annie Beckstrom, Catie Lane Bailey, and Nicole Osborne Watson who presented a comprehensive overview of key legislation from Tennessee's 114th General Assembly. The highlights spanned a broad spectrum of issues including education, immigration, healthcare, public safety, and regulatory reforms. Below is a summary:

FY25-26 State Budget

The General Assembly passed a \$59.8 billion budget emphasizing infrastructure, education, and emergency relief. Key allocations included:

- **\$1B** for road construction
- **\$447M** for private school scholarships
- **\$198.4M** in teacher bonuses
- **\$95.5M** for long-term care enhancements
- **\$130M** for the Violent Crime Intervention Fund
- **\$25M** to establish a Farmland Conservation Fund
- **\$244M** for K-12 TISA formula



(Con't on Page 7)

Education Initiatives

Education Freedom Scholarship Act (SB 6001/HB 6004/PC 7): Creates a program that provides funds to eligible students to attend private schools or use for other educational expenses. Program includes up to 20,000 scholarships and a one-time bonus for teachers.

Healthcare Legislation

Corporate Practice of Medicine Reform (SB 764/HB 979/PC 509): Rural hospitals and children’s hospitals directly employ anesthesiologists, radiologists, pathologists, and emergency physicians. Also authorizes Certified Anesthesiologist Assistants to practice in Tennessee.

340B Regulations (SB 1414/HB 1242/PC 404): Imposes new restrictions on how drug manufacturers interact with contract pharmacies, requiring manufacturers to provide products to certain commercial pharmacies without adequate safeguards to ensure that the 340B discounts are ultimately used to benefit the vulnerable patient populations the program is designed to support.

Immigration

Immigration Enforcement (SB 6002/HB 6001/PC 1): Establishes the Centralized Immigration Enforcement Division, within the Department of Safety, led by a Chief Immigration Enforcement Officer appointed by the Governor.

Immigration Enforcement Fund: Creates grant program to facilitate enforcement of federal immigration laws, detentions and removals, and investigations.

Driver’s Licenses: Only U.S. citizens may hold standard licenses; lawful permanent residents will receive temporary licenses.

Penalties for Sanctuary Policies: A government entity that adopts a sanctuary policy is ineligible to enter into a grant contract. Makes it a Class E felony to violate such prohibitions and includes any official who votes affirmatively to adopt such a policy.

Harboring Illegal Immigrants (SB 392/HB 322/PC 424): Creates new criminal, human smuggling which includes aggravated charges when minors under thirteen are involved. Human smuggling is a Class E felony. Aggravated human smuggling is a Class A felony.

Criminal Justice

Savanna’s Law (SB 324/HB 1200/PC 520): Creates a public registry for second or subsequent offense domestic violence offenders. The length of time on the registry varies between five and twenty years based on the number of prior convictions.

Board of Parole Bill (SB 455/HB 527) (Vetoed): Would have removed the limitations on the Board of Parole’s authority to deny parole based solely on the seriousness of the offense for certain offenses.

Public Health & Consumer Products

Hemp Regulation (SB 1413/HB 1376/PC 526): Restricts THC concentration, bans THCa in excess of 0.3%, shifts regulatory authority to the Alcoholic Beverage Commission, limits sales to age-restricted retailers, and eliminates sales in convenience stores and grocery stores.

Vapor Product Registration and Taxation (SB 0763/HB 0968/PC 324): Establishes a vapor product directory, imposes a 10% wholesale tax, requires FDA compliance, and introduces penalties for marketing to minors or unauthorized sales.

DEI Rollbacks

- **Dismantle DEI in Employment Act (SB 1083/HB622/PC 494):** Bans demographic criteria in hiring decisions by public entities unless required to receive federal funding.

Dismantling DEI Departments Act (SB 1084/HB 923/PC 458): Prohibits government entities from maintaining DEI offices or programs that involve "discriminatory preferences."

Agriculture & Land Use

Farmland Preservation Act (SB 207/HB 1325/PC 470): Establishes a grant program for conservation easements to prevent farmland development and promote land conservation.

Other Key Measures

Pesticide Manufacturer Liability Bill (HB 809/SB 527): Deferred until 2026; would have limited failure-to-warn lawsuits for federally labeled pesticides.

Board Member Spotlight: Kennedy Krieg



Where are you from? Tell me about your path to practicing law.

I'm originally from Moline, Iowa, a very small town in the northwest corner of the state. My path to practicing law began with a strong interest in criminal justice and the legal system. I majored in psychology and criminology at the University of Denver, which only deepened my interest in the legal field, particularly criminal law. I went on to attend law school at Belmont University, where I interned with two well-respected criminal defense firms in Nashville. Those experiences gave me invaluable, real-world insight and confirmed that this was the right path for me.

What do you do professionally, and what is your favorite part of your job?

I currently practice criminal defense at Ryan C. Davis Law. My favorite part of the job is supporting and advocating for clients as they navigate what is often one of the most difficult and uncertain times in their lives. I believe everyone deserves to be treated fairly and to have someone in their corner who is truly looking out for them, and I have the privilege of doing that every day.

Why did you join LAW?

I joined LAW at the insistence of my former coworker, Jorie Zajicek. Over the past year and a half, I've really come to value the LAW community and opportunities that come with being part of LAW.

What leadership roles have had with LAW?

Last year, I served as the Networking Committee Co-Chair alongside Bart Pickett. I am currently serving as a First-Year Director.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

Outside of work, I love spending time with my fiancé and close friends. I enjoy trying new restaurants around Nashville and am always on the lookout for a great new spot. I'm also a big fan of reality TV, it's my favorite way to unwind at the end of the day.

It's a Saturday night in Nashville, what are you up to?

You'll probably find me either out grabbing dinner and drinks with friends or curled up on the couch with takeout, watching a movie.

What woman inspires you and why?

My mom inspires me more than anyone. Her strength, kindness, and unwavering support for the people she loves have shaped the person I am today. She's always led with resilience and grace, and she's shown me the importance of staying grounded, working hard, and staying true to yourself. She's been my biggest cheerleader and has always encouraged me to pursue whatever I set my mind to.

New Member Spotlight: Crystal Armstrong



Where are you from? Tell me about your path to practicing law.

I'm originally from Birmingham, Alabama—born and raised. My path to practicing law has been anything but traditional. Before law school, I worked as a school psychologist for the Franklin Special School District. In that role, I supported students, families, and educators in several areas, including special education eligibility. This involved conducting psychoeducational assessments for students with moderate to severe disabilities, as well as providing support with behavioral interventions and mental health advocacy. That experience sparked my interest in legal issues affecting students and schools, and I initially planned to pursue a career in Special Education or Higher Education Law.

However, during law school, I had the opportunity to work as a summer associate at large firms, which shifted my perspective. After graduating, I began my legal career as a healthcare associate in Big Law. Though it was

a departure from my original plan, the transition allowed me to develop a broad skill set that continues to serve me in my practice today.

What do you do professionally, and what is your favorite part of your job?

I'm currently an associate attorney at Dismukes Law, PLLC in Franklin, TN, practicing estate, trust, and business planning. I recently made the pivot to this practice area, and I'm really enjoying it so far. What I love most is the client-facing nature of the role—helping individuals and families plan for their futures and protect what matters most. I also appreciate the blend of legal strategy and creativity the work requires.

When and why did you first get involved in LAW? This is my first year serving as a member of LAW, and I'm also honored to serve as Co-Chair of the Networking Committee. I was encouraged to join by Shundra Manning. We connected before I moved to Nashville and stayed in touch. Shortly after relocating, Shundra reached out to encourage me to get involved, and I'm really glad I did.

I decided to join the Lawyers' Association for Women because I value the community and support that comes from being part of a network of accomplished women attorneys. I believe that strong connections and mentorship are essential for growth and success, especially as a newer member of the Nashville legal community. Being part of LAW allows me to both learn from experienced leaders and contribute to advancing women in law. I'm excited to serve as Co-Chair of the Networking Committee because I love helping create opportunities for women lawyers to connect, support each other, and grow professionally.

Describe yourself. I'd say I'm a mix of introvert and extrovert—I can be pretty quiet at times, but I step up confidently when leadership is needed. I'm ambitious, hardworking, and always looking for ways to grow. I've got a creative side, too—I'm a lifelong dancer and a former musician, so the arts have always been a big part of who I am. I love to laugh and try not to take myself too seriously, even when the work is serious. I'm someone who brings a mix of focus, flexibility, and heart to everything I do.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work? This answer will probably change in August—I'm starting the part-time Tax LL.M. program at Georgetown this fall, so my Saturday nights may start looking a lot more like study sessions! But for now, I really enjoy staying active with weightlifting classes and Pure Barre. I also love spending time with family and friends—whether that's trying a new restaurant, catching up over coffee, or just hanging out at home.

(Con't on pg. 10)

What woman inspires you and why? My mom inspires me the most. She’s been a constant presence throughout my life—always supportive, always showing up, and always encouraging me to be my best self. She’s outgoing, assertive, and incredibly free-hearted. She has a natural way of making people feel loved and seen, often through laughter, honesty, and unwavering support.

In 2024, I went through some personal challenges that took a real toll on my mental health, and even though I was miles away in Dallas, TX, she was with me every step of the way—even supporting me when I made the difficult decision to leave Dallas and return to Middle Tennessee. Her encouragement and presence during that time meant everything to me.

She inspires me to lead with compassion while standing firm in who I am. I hope I can pour into my future children the way she has poured into me.



Culinary Docket: All'Antico Vinaio

by Jorie Zajicek

Two years ago, I wandered the cobblestone streets of Florence, Italy, taking in the Renaissance architecture, the scent of fresh espresso, and, of course, the unforgettable food. Out of all the meals I enjoyed, one experience stood out and has stayed with me long after I returned home: a sandwich from All'Antico Vinaio. Tucked just steps from the Piazza della Signoria, this humble panini shop was buzzing with locals and tourists alike, all eagerly lining up for the same thing, piles of savory Tuscan meats, cheeses, and sauces stacked on warm, crusty schiacciata bread.

Known for its made-to-order sandwiches, All'Antico Vinaio uses traditional Italian ingredients like porchetta, prosciutto, truffle cream, stracchino cheese, artichokes, and more, all tucked inside their signature, freshly baked schiacciata bread.

Nashville is now home to two locations: one in Midtown and the other in the Gulch. I've already visited the Gulch location twice, and each visit transported me right back to the street corner in Florence, sandwich in hand, trying not to lose a single crumb.

I tried the La Dante, a rich and savory option featuring truffle cream, and the La District, which was light and fresh, perfect for a hot summer day. While I typically shy away from spice, I'm already looking forward to trying the Italian Hot next.

If you're looking for a taste of Italy without booking a flight, All'Antico Vinaio in Nashville is the next best thing.



Venice and the Ottoman Empire

by Jorie Zajicek

If you are anything like me, when someone asks me what there is to do in Nashville, my mind instantly goes to the incredible restaurants, the latest rooftop bars, and, of course, the music. However, if you are looking for something a little different to do in Nashville, I recently found myself at the Frist Art Museum for the first time to see their new exhibit: Venice and the Ottoman Empire. If you're craving a cultural experience beyond a sandwich at All'Antico Vinnaio, this one is worth the trip.

From the moment you enter, the sound of crashing waves transports you straight into the Mediterranean world of centuries past. The exhibit explores the rich cultural exchange between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, two historic powerhouses connected by trade, diplomacy, art, and conflict.

The collection is stunning: paintings, textiles, silks, metalwork, pottery, glassworks, music, and even armor. Each artifact tells the story of how these two civilizations influenced one another through commerce and creativity.

One of my favorite parts of the exhibit was a sensory feature that lets you actually smell different scents that once traveled the Ottoman-Venetian trade routes. There is also a tactile display that allows you to touch and feel the kinds of textiles that would have been traded during that period.

Whether you're a history buff, an art enthusiast, or just looking to do something outside your usual Nashville routine, Venice and the Ottoman Empire offers a captivating glimpse into a world where cultures met, mingled, and left behind a legacy of beauty and complexity.



LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN
PRESENTS THE 2025 MARION GRIFFIN
WOMEN'S SYMPOSIUM SPEAKER SERIES

Raising Our Voices for Change

September 18, 2025
Nashville City Club

Featuring Helen Wan,
bestselling author of
The Partner Track —
now a hit Netflix
original series — and
trailblazing attorney
& storyteller



"Finding Your Voice" discussion with Helen Wan, bestselling author of *The Partner Track* – now a hit Netflix original series — and trailblazing attorney & storyteller

Banquet lunch - 4 hours of CLE - top-notch breakout sessions:

Generation XYZ: Collaborating and Mentoring Across Generations

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- Amy Willoughby Bryant, Office of Conservatorship Management
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The Art of Legislative Change

- Grace Stranch, Harpeth Conservancy
- Tyler Yarbro, TN Freedom Circle
- Stacie Odeneal, Child Welfare Law Specialist
- Spring Miller, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition

Mindset Mastery for Lawyers

- Jackie Cascarano, Endeavor Law Group

Breaking Point: The Future of Affinity Bars

- Julie Bhattacharya Peak, Tennessee Asian Pacific American Bar Association
- Leighann Ness, Lawyers' Association for Women
- Ginette Garza Brown, Hispanic Bar Association
- Cynthia Lee, Napier-Looby Bar Association

Glass Ceilings and Crystal Balls: Predicting the Future of Women in Legal Leadership

- Joycelyn Stevenson, Littler
- Abby Sparks, TN Department of Human Services
- Lauren Jacque, Bradley
- Sam Jackson, Spencer Fane



Former long-time LAS Executive Director, Ashley Wiltshire, credit Dot Dobbins with first bringing domestic violence awareness to what was then called Legal Services of Nashville. Dot came to work at LSN in the summer of 1972, as a law clerk and then stayed on after graduation practicing at our Matthew Walker Health Center office in North Nashville. Among her many accomplishments, Dot played a foundational role in opening Nashville's first domestic violence shelter through the YWCA. She wrote the first Order of Protection legislation for Tennessee and worked with other legal services advocates and organizations to get the legislation passed. When LSN created a Family Law Unit for its Nashville Office, Dot quickly became its Lead Attorney, a position she held for more than a decade. Dot's impact on what is now Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland (LASMTC) has been tremendous. As a family law attorney myself, I was honored to continue Dot's legacy, including serving as Lead Attorney for our Nashville Family Law Unit, along with other LAW trailblazers like Jean Crowe, Lucinda Smith, and Margaret Behm.

You can learn much more about Dot's work at LASMTC in Ashley Wiltshire's book, *Everyday Justice: A Legal Aid Story*. I considered Dot a friend and am very saddened by this unfortunate occurrence. LASMTC honors her life and legacy today and always.

Once a Legal Aider, Always a Legal Aider.

Darkenya W. Waller

**Thank you to our Sustaining Members who support the programs,
mission and purpose of LAW above and beyond the sliding income scale.**

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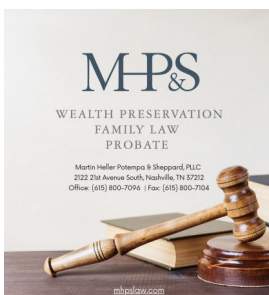
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