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Who Represents You?

by Lindsay Verity, GAWL
 President, 2011-2012

“Whatever you do, don’t tell me that you don’t know who represents your district in the Georgia legislature.” When a lobbyist friend said this to me, I was thankful that I had looked mine up right before speaking with her. However, I realized that she was right; a lot of us do not know who is actually representing us at the Capitol and we probably should. As lawyers, we spend every day working with the laws that have been passed by the legislature, but how many of us are actually involved in helping write the laws?

As lawyers, we have specialized knowledge of how the laws in our practice areas actually work and, as such, we should be sharing the knowledge with our legislators. This year, GAWL is encouraging our members to be more effective advocates at the legislature. We started with a happy hour last summer to get to know the female representatives and senators. In partnership with the Georgia Association of Black Women Lawyers, we had a huge turnout to the event and learned that our legislators are really quite approachable.

In October, we organized a training to increase our civic engagement. It started with a primer on how the Georgia legislature actually works and ways to find out more about it. We then learned some tips on how to be an effective advocate by personalizing the issues. Representatives Mary Margaret Oliver and Elena Parent joined

us to give advice on how to help good people get elected. Additionally, Representative Oliver taught us that if you contact your legislator three times in a year, he or she will remember



Lindsay Verity

you. First, call or email before the legislative session starts to tell your legislators what upcoming pieces of legislation are important to you. Second, contact them during the session to ask them to support or oppose a piece of legislation. Third, follow-up with them after the session ends to thank them for doing what you asked or to politely tell them that you are disappointed with their vote on your issue.

To continue our advocacy training, GAWL’s Work Place and Public Policy Committee hosted a Legislative Preview Session in November which was generously sponsored by Troutman Sanders. At the event, representatives from various organizations briefly presented their legislative agendas for the upcoming Legislative Session. Speakers included members from the State Bar of Georgia, Georgia Women for a Change,

the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association, 2020 Georgia, Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials, the City of Atlanta, Georgia Appleseed, Voices for Georgia’s Children, and the Barton Child Law and Policy Center at Emory University School of Law. After the presentation, attendees mingled with the organization’s representatives to learn more about how they can get involved. These presentations gave our members an opportunity to learn more about specific pieces of legislation to follow throughout the legislative session.

Now, the session has begun and it is time to put our words into action. GAWL encourages you to contact your legislators, attend hearings, and get involved. The State Bar of Georgia follows legislation of interest to lawyers and has an informative weekly legislative video summary. Additionally, we invite you to join our advocacy listserv through which members disseminate information about specific bills that might be of interests to our members and opportunities for involvement. To join, please send an email to gawladvocacy+subscribe@googlegroups.com.

Lindsay C. Verity is the Director of the Grandparent/Relative Caregiver Project at the Atlanta Legal Aid Society. Lindsay assists relatives with adopting or gaining custody of the children in their care and trains volunteer attorneys to handle adoption cases for these long-term caregivers.

Workplace Investigations: Who Should Conduct Them?

by Jennifer H. Keaton, Esq.

Did you know that OSHA alone enforces 21 whistleblower and retaliation laws that protect certain employees? When coupled with state laws and other civil rights laws that have been enacted over the past two decades, it should be no surprise that employers are increasingly finding that tending to their employees is a significant part of taking care of their bottom line.

Many employers have learned “the hard way” that administrative investigations and litigation are too costly to ignore. As a result, in an effort to identify and solve issues sooner rather than later, many employers have become increasingly open to creating ways for employees to share and raise concerns or complaints about the terms of their employment.

Along these lines, many employers have looked to their internal resources to create ways for employees to share

concerns. Employee handbooks often contain a complaint procedure for sexual harassment concerns. Some employers have established “hot lines” for complaints that can be made anonymously by employees. A growing area of response involves using in-house counsel or Human Resources/Risk Management professionals to conduct investigations when an employee concern or complaint is raised internally.

Use of a current employee as a workplace investigator highlights one of the major issues of workplace investigations: who should conduct the investigation? Often, investigators who are also employees are criticized for being biased. Some investigators may not have the necessary experience or skills to conduct an internal workplace investigation. In California, for example, workplace investigators generally must be an attorney or a licensed private investigator.

Georgia does not specifically regulate

workplace investigators or impose any certification requirements. However, there are some common traits that any employer should consider when engaging an employee or external investigator to review an employee’s complaint:

1. Does the investigator have any conflict of interest with regard to the individuals involved?
2. Does the investigator have a strong knowledge of personnel and civil rights laws?
3. Does the investigator know how to gather documents and interview witnesses while maintaining appropriate documentation?
4. Does the investigator have experience in writing a report that details the complaint(s), the evidence obtained, how the evidence was weighed in making factual conclusions, and why certain conclusions as to what did or did not occur were made?
5. If the investigator is an employee,

will the employee be able to conduct the investigation impartially and quickly in light of other duties?

For many employers in Georgia, the pool of external workplace investigators is limited to attorneys or to certain neutral services firms, such as One Mediation. With the expansion of demand for workplace investigators and professional organizations, such as the Association of Workplace Investigators, the prevalence of qualified workplace investigators should expand as the industry develops and matures.

Jennifer Keaton is a Labor & Employment attorney who now focuses her practice as a neutral with One Mediation. She serves as a mediator, arbitrator and workplace investigator in employment matters and is a Charter Member of the Association of Workplace Investigators. Contact Ms. Keaton at jkeaton@onemediation.com for more information or comments.

GAWL’s Second Annual Law Suits Fashion Show A Success *Thank you, Belk!*

GAWL’s Second Annual Law Suits Fashion Show at Belk was a fun success. This year, Belk moved inventory and store fixtures to bring the fashion runway inside of its department store. The new setup allowed the 90+ attendees to mingle without interruption and to enjoy longer access to the food and drinks catered by Davio’s. Attendees enjoyed Davio’s catering so much that several groups gathered at Davio’s after the event for dinner.

GAWL wishes to thank Belk for

its generous contribution. Belk provided the space, the consultants and attire for our members modeling, the gift bags for attendees, and a festive atmosphere for the fun. In addition to providing most everything needed for the show, Belk enabled GAWL to raise funds through its Charity Sale. Belk announced in December 2011 that its Charity Sale event “raised over \$5 million for more than 7,700 participating nonprofits throughout Belk’s 16-state market area.”¹ GAWL was one of

those nonprofits! We’ll receive the final tally of funds raised soon. Look for more information about the fundraiser results and more pictures in our April quarterly newsletter.

Thank you to our GAWL members who volunteered their time to model, including the Court of Appeals Judge Sara Doyle and Supreme Court Chief Justice Carol Hunstein. Their fellow models were Cynthia Burnside, Semrawit Berhane, Susan Campbell, Ruth Ann Campbell, Veronica Cope,

Erica Ghali, Kathleen Lentz, Rachel Platt, Pilar Prinz, Isabel Reynolds, Ivy Reynolds, Laurie Speed-Dalton, Lindsay Verity and Amanda Wick. All of them did a beautiful job. What a great show!

¹PR Newswire (12/09/2011). Belk fall charity sale raises more than \$5 million for thousands of nonprofits. Retrieved from <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/belk-fall-charity-sale-raises-more-than-5-million-for-thousands-of-nonprofits-135321023.html>



“GET TO KNOW GAWL” HAPPY HOURS

The New Year marks the start of the First Annual GAWL Membership Drive! GAWL is hosting a series of “Get to Know GAWL” Happy Hours starting January 18, 2012 around the metro area. All events are from 5:30 to 7:30 or thereabouts. The cost is \$10, which will entitle each guest to at least one free drink and appetizers. Non-members who join at the event will be eligible to win one of the exciting door prize(s). Members who bring (or send) one or more non-members will be eligible to win prizes as well, so spread the word! Please register for the events by visiting the GAWL calendar at www.gawl.org. Cash or check only at the door.

- Jan. 18 - d’Vine Wine Bar - 5486 Chamblee Dunwoody Road, Atlanta, GA 30338 (Dunwoody) - SPECIAL GUESTS HON. KIMBERLY ESMOND-ADAMS, HON. DAX LOPEZ
- Jan. 19 - Social - 3621 Vinings Slope SE,

- Suite 4100, Atlanta, GA 30339 (Vinings/Smyrna) - SPECIAL GUEST HON. MARIA GOLICK
- Jan. 23 - Manuel’s Tavern - 602 N. Highland Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30307 (Midtown) - SPECIAL GUESTS HON. SARA DOYLE, HON. KEITH BLACKWELL, HON. SUSAN EDLEIN, HON. DAX LOPEZ
- Jan. 24 - Wine Styles - 3752 Cascade Road SW, #140, Atlanta, GA 30331 (Cascade)
- Jan. 25 - Pour - 1418 Dresden Ave., Atlanta, GA 30319 (Brookhaven) - SPECIAL GUEST STATE REPRESENTATIVE ELENA PARENT
- Jan. 31 - Eddie’s Attic - 515 N. McDonough St., Decatur, GA 30030 (Decatur)
- Feb. 2 - Marietta Wine Market - 18 Powder Springs St., Marietta, GA 30064 (Marietta)

DON’T MISS OUT!

Judge LaGrua Hosts GAWL’s Atlanta Chapter Annual Holiday Party

On December 13, 2011, Fulton County Superior Court Judge Shawn Ellen LaGrua hosted GAWL’s Atlanta Chapter Annual Holiday Party at her home. Space quickly filled as over 100 attendees mingled, including Chief Justice Hunstein, Court of Appeals Judge Keith Blackwell, Judge Dax Lopez, Judge Kelly Lee, and Judge Susan Edlein. GAWL especially thanks Judge LaGrua for her warm hospitality.

As in past years, the Atlanta Chapter collected donations for a local non-profit as an “entry fee.” This year, the Atlanta Chapter collected over \$1,200 in donations for the Women’s Resource Center to End

Domestic Violence in addition to over two large boxes of toiletries for the GAWL Foundation Community Service Committee’s Refresh Georgia campaign.

Judge Edlein’s husband, Scott Edlein, and his catering company, You Should Eat!, provided delicious food and quality service. GAWL also would like to acknowledge McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP, in particular, Laura Miller and Emily Woods, for supplying drinks, flatware and napkins and for assisting with set up and clean up.

Thank you to all the individuals who joined GAWL in celebrating the season and gave so generously!

Amanda Wick Receives the 2011 Honorable Debra Bernes Community Volunteer Award

Amanda Wick was the recipient of the 2011 Honorable Debra Bernes Community Volunteer Award in recognition of her strong commitment to and support of GAWL and the GAWL Foundation. This award was created in memory of Judge Debra Halpern Bernes, who, in addition to her admirable legal career and profes-

sional service, unselfishly invested her time and energy in a broad spectrum of civic and charitable organizations.

Not only does Amanda work tirelessly to promote GAWL and the GAWL Foundation through her role on the Board of Directors as VP of the Strategic Partnerships, but she is also

active in the Atlanta Junior League and the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. When Amanda first joined GAWL, she joined several committees and was a superstar of each. She has continued this same dedication to GAWL and GAWL Foundation throughout her years of service. Thank you, Amanda!

Save the date for the annual GAWL Foundation art auction

APRIL 14, 2012

**Live and silent auction
Heavy Hors D’oeuvres
Cocktails**

7-10PM

**Art Space International
1192 Huff Rd.
Atlanta GA, 30318**

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