

PRO BONO

HONOR ROLL



The State Bar of Nevada Board of Governors and the Access to Justice Commission extend a special thanks to the following attorneys who generously accepted cases in February 2014, through the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Washoe Legal Services, Nevada Legal Services and Volunteer Attorneys for Rural Nevadans.

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BOLD honors multiple cases accepted and/or sessions conducted within the month.

ONE FOCUS

A SPOTLIGHT ON PRO BONO

Betsy*, who was living in Kentucky, contacted Nevada Legal Services' Reno office with a request for pro bono assistance pertaining to a custody order that originated in Elko County. Betsy was a victim of domestic violence and, one year prior to contacting Nevada Legal Services, she had awakened in the hospital with a fractured skull, in addition to multiple other injuries. Upon discharge from the hospital, she went to find her son, but was told that the child's father (who was also the person who had inflicted abuse upon her) had taken their son out of the area; no one knew where they were. Fearing further injury and unable to locate her son, she moved in with her family in Kentucky.

Nevada Legal Services investigated the matter, located the father and immediately placed the case with Elko attorney Julie Cavanaugh-Bill. Coincidentally, it was discovered that the father had returned to Elko, had recently been arrested and was in custody. At the time of the arrest, Betsy's son had been in his father's custody and was later released into the custody of family members. Upon learning the whereabouts of Betsy's son, Attorney Cavanaugh-Bill was able to obtain an emergency enforcement order that granted sole custody to Betsy.

The Elko sheriff accompanied Betsy to the location where she was to be reunited with her son, only to learn that the child had been removed by other family members who resided on tribal land. Attorney Cavanaugh-Bill contacted the tribal police, who took Betsy to a second location where her son was reportedly being held. Upon arrival at the second location, Betsy and the tribal police were told that her son was not there. As the tribal officers were questioning the adult at this home, Betsy saw her son peering out the front window of the home and immediately informed the officers that her son was there. After another refusal to release the little boy, the promise of a warrant and the declared intent to return to the home with more officers later, Betsy's son was sent out of the house and into his mother's arms. Betsy and her son were reunited after 15 months of separation, and they both returned to Kentucky to live with her family. The father was convicted on multiple charges.

**The client's name has been changed to protect her identity.*

About the Attorney:

Julie Cavanaugh-Bill is the managing member of the Cavanaugh-Bill Law Offices in Elko and brings more than 17 years of Native American and indigenous rights experience to the northern Nevada law practice. Her experience ranges from intergovernmental relations to active involvement in tribal, federal and international litigation. She has worked on two separate U.S. Supreme Court cases involving Native American jurisdictional and resource rights issues and has written several articles and guidebooks on indigenous rights, corporate engagement and human rights lawyering. Cavanaugh-Bill now handles not only tribal law cases, but a plethora of child welfare and social justice casework.

The Attorney's Angle:

Nevada Lawyer: What, if anything, about the case stayed with you?

Cavanaugh-Bill: That I was a part of reuniting this mother with her little boy, and the emergency nature of the case. Here is this terribly abused mother, who woke up in the hospital after being beaten so badly, and all she knew is that her son was with the man who did this to her, and she has no idea where they are. I will never forget seeing the face of the little boy when they brought him into my office, and I got to tell him that his mommy had been looking for him for so long.

NL: What tip(s) can you offer attorneys interested in or considering taking a pro bono case?

Cavanaugh-Bill: If you want to make your heart feel good, just take one pro bono case. I also feel that, as lawyers, we possess a certain set of skills and expertise and that we have a professional obligation to provide those services to our community members when asked. ■