

# Advancing Equal Access to Justice

## Exploring pro bono representation and the impact it has on the community and domestic violence survivors.

Date & Time:

September 25, 2020  
10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

[Click here to register!](#)

Hosts:

U.S. District Court for  
the Central District of  
Illinois

U.S. District Court for  
the Southern District of  
Illinois

In Conjunction with:  
Central District of Illinois  
Federal Bar Association  
and  
Prairie State Legal Services

- ❖ Welcome and Submitting Questions
  - Shig Yasunaga, Clerk of Court for the Central District of Illinois
  - Meg Robertie, Clerk of Court for the Southern District of Illinois
- ❖ Opening Remarks
  - The Honorable Sara Darrow, Chief Judge for the Central District of Illinois
  - The Honorable Nancy J. Rosenstengel, Chief Judge for the Southern District of Illinois
- ❖ Prosecuting Domestic Violence Cases and the Resources and Assistance Available to Domestic Violence Survivors
  - Jason Emmanuel, Assistant State's Attorney for St. Clair County
  - Nicole Bonfiglio, Victim Witness Specialist for St. Clair County
  - Janisha Pealer, Legal Advocate for the Violence Prevention Center
- ❖ Surviving Domestic Violence
  - Patricia McKnight: Advocate, Mentor, Domestic Violence Survivor, Author
- ❖ Pro Bono Representation: The Impact on the Community and Laws that Protect Survivors of Domestic Violence
  - Denise Conklin, Managing Attorney at Prairie State Legal Services
- ❖ Central and Southern Districts of Illinois Pro Bono Programs
  - Meg Robertie, Clerk of Court for the Southern District of Illinois
  - Denise Koester, Chief Deputy Clerk for the Central District of Illinois
- ❖ Closing
  - Meg Robertie, Clerk of Court for the Southern District of Illinois



\*\* This is a free seminar and will be held remotely via Zoom. 1.0 hour of general Illinois CLE credit will be applied for by the Central District of Illinois Federal Bar Association. \*\*

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# BIOGRAPHIES

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## **The Honorable Sara Darrow, Chief United States District Judge of the Central District of Illinois**

Judge Darrow has served as a district court judge in the Rock Island Division of the Central District of Illinois since 2011. She was nominated by President Barack Obama, on the recommendation of Senator Dick Durbin. She was appointed Chief Judge in 2019. Judge Darrow has served on the Judicial Conference Committee on the Administration of the Bankruptcy System since 2017 and in 2019, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts appointed her Chair of the Committee.

Prior to her judicial appointment, Chief Judge Darrow worked at the United States Attorney's Office in Rock Island, Illinois, for eight years where she prosecuted significant federal crimes involving firearms, drugs, gangs, fraud, money laundering, and corruption. She also coordinated the federal programs *Project Safe Neighborhoods*, designed to reduce gun violence, and *Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force*, designed to target major drug trafficking organizations. From 1999 to 2003, Judge Darrow worked in the Henry County State's Attorney's Office in Cambridge, Illinois, where she became First Assistant State's Attorney and tried major felony, domestic violence, and child exploitation cases. Judge Darrow also worked as a low-income community organizer in Washington, DC, between college and law school. Judge Darrow received her undergraduate degree from Marquette University and her law degree from Saint Louis University School of Law.

Judge Darrow lives in Rock Island with her husband Clarence Darrow, who serves as a Fourteenth Judicial Circuit Judge in Rock Island County. They have six children—one recent college graduate, three current college students, and two still living at home.

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## **The Honorable Nancy J. Rosenstengel, Chief United States District Judge of the Southern District of Illinois**

Nancy J. Rosenstengel is the Chief United States District Judge in the Southern District of Illinois. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree, *cum laude*, in 1990 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a Juris Doctorate, *cum laude*, in 1993 from Southern Illinois University School of Law. Before joining the bench, she was a member of the Illinois and Missouri bars, practicing litigation in state and federal courts in St. Louis, Missouri. She later served as a career law clerk to United States District Judge G. Patrick Murphy, and as Clerk of Court in the Southern District of Illinois, a high-level administrative position.

On November 7, 2013, President Obama nominated Rosenstengel to serve as a United States District Judge. The Senate voted 95-0 for final confirmation on May 8, 2014, and she received her judicial commission on May 12, 2014. Rosenstengel is the first female district judge to serve in the Southern District of Illinois (and also was the first female to serve as Clerk of Court).

In April 2019, Rosenstengel became Chief Judge for the Southern District of Illinois. She is the Past President of the local chapter of the Federal Bar Association and serves on several committees for the Seventh Circuit United States Court of Appeals.

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### **Meg Robertie, Clerk of Court for the United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois**

Meg Robertie is the Clerk of Court for the United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois and a graduate of Bates College, and St. Louis University School of Law. While in law school, Meg was editor of the America Bar Association's Fidelity & Surety News.

Upon graduation, she worked in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Illinois. In 1994, Meg joined the U.S. District Court in East St. Louis as a law clerk for Magistrate Judge Clifford J. Proud. She later clerked for Chief Judge Michael J. Reagan, and then worked on the Court's Pro Se Team.

2016 brought a 90 degree turn toward administration—Meg became Counsel to the Court and Director of Operations. In 2018, she became Clerk of Court, while continuing her role as Counsel to Chief Judge Nancy J. Rosenstengel.

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### **Shig Yasunaga, Clerk of Court for the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois**

Shig Yasunaga is the Clerk of Court for the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois. Between August 2011, and August 2018, Shig served as a career law clerk to Senior District Court Judge Michael M. Mihm. Shig graduated *magna cum laude* from Southern Illinois University in May 2000. Upon graduation, Shig served as Judge Mihm's term clerk. Between September 2001, and November 2008, Shig, as an associate general counsel, was involved in the handling of litigation and regulatory matters for Illinois Power Company and Ameren. In November 2008, Shig returned to his hometown as an associate university counsel for the University of Illinois, primarily working in employment and labor matters.

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### **Denise Koester, Chief Deputy Clerk for the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois**

Denise Koester is the Chief Deputy Clerk and the Pro Bono Coordinator for the Central District of Illinois. Denise began her career with the U.S. District Court in 1991 and has held the positions of Case Administrator, Jury Clerk, Courtroom Deputy and Divisional Manager prior to her appointment as Chief Deputy Clerk in 2012. The experience she gained in all of these roles has given her important insight into all aspects of the Clerk's Office. Denise is a 2010 graduate of the Federal Judicial Center's Federal Court Leadership Program. From 2013 – 2018, Denise served as a Faculty Coach with the Federal Judicial Center New Supervisor's Development Program, mentoring new supervisors through the challenges of their new role. In her role as Pro Bono Coordinator, Denise recruits attorneys to assist with indigent pro se parties and works with these attorneys to obtain reimbursement through the program.

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### **Jason Emmanuel, Criminal Division Chief at the State's Attorney Office of St. Clair County, Illinois**

Jason Emmanuel is a Criminal Division Chief at the State's Attorney Office of St. Clair County, Illinois. He received his J.D from the University of Iowa College of Law with Distinction in 2014, receiving the Erich D. Mathias Award for International Social Justice. He was an associate editor and student writer for the *Transational Law and Contemporary Problems* legal Journal and completed externships at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia as well as the United States District Court Southern District of Iowa. His prosecutorial experience includes a 2013 summer clerkship with the United States Attorney's Office in the Southern District of Illinois before joining the St. Clair County State's Attorney Office in 2014. Before becoming a Division Chief, Jason served in the Domestic Violence Unit, the General Felony Division, the Violent Crimes Unit, and as a

Supervisor of the Domestic Violence & Special Victims Unit. As a Supervisor of the Domestic Violence & Special Victims Unit, his responsibilities included overseeing three attorneys, a survivor/witness specialist and acting as the Office's primary point of contact for the VAWA Grant funded Multidisciplinary Team which included the St. Clair County Sheriff's Department, St. Clair County Probation Department, The Violence Prevention Center Southwestern Illinois, and Call 4 Help Inc. He has taught multiple trainings for law enforcement on domestic violence response and presented on several occasions for the National Coalition for Domestic Violence as a webinar speaker.

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**Denise E. Conklin, Managing Attorney at Prairie State Legal Services, Inc.**

In October 2009, Denise Conklin began serving as the Managing Attorney of the Peoria office of Prairie State Legal Services (PSLS). Denise graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1997, and with a BA in English Literature from the University of Illinois in 1994. Denise joined PSLS as a Staff Attorney in January 2007 after working as a Volunteer Attorney since 2004. Prior to joining PSLS, Denise worked as a Senior Associate in the Litigation Department of Katten Muchin Rosenman law firm in Chicago, Illinois. Denise is admitted to practice law in the State of Illinois and in the United States District Court for the Northern and Central Districts of Illinois. Denise's practice focuses on all aspects of poverty law, including family law, government benefits, education law, and housing law, with an emphasis on access to justice and poverty alleviation. Denise is married to Darren Conklin and they have three children.

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**Nicole F. Bonfiglio, Victim Witness Specialist for the St. Clair County State's Attorney's Office**

Nicole Bonfiglio is the Victim Witness Specialist for the St. Clair County State's Attorney's Office in Belleville, Illinois. Nicole earned a dual B.S. from Western Illinois University in Psychology and Law Enforcement before graduating from Lindenwood University with a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice. Nicole began her career at the St. Clair County State's Attorney's Office as an intern in 2015 before being hired into her role as the Victim Witness Specialist in 2016. In this role, she has worked exclusively with survivors of domestic violence, interpersonal violence, and sexual assault by acting as a liaison between crime victims and the State's Attorney's Office. Her responsibilities include providing critical information about both the criminal justice proceedings and legal resources available to the survivor. As the Victim Witness Specialist she relays this information while making every effort to mitigate the stress and difficulties that come from being a survivor or a witness to a crime. In addition to her work with survivors, Nicole works closely to coordinate with local police departments and other victim services organizations including the Violence Prevention Center of Southwestern Illinois and Call for Help, Inc. in order to provide the most comprehensive services possible. Nicole is a member of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and has been a speaker at their bi-annual conference. Her involvement with the NCADV is motivated by both her professional capacity as an advocate and as a survivor of domestic violence and child abuse herself.

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**Janisha Pealer, Legal Advocate for the Violence Prevention Center**

Janisha has been working to end domestic violence since 2016. Janisha has a BA from Greenville University in History and Political Science. She currently works at the Violence Prevention Center as a Legal Advocate. In her role, she assists survivors of Domestic Violence with orders of protection and provides support and assistance with family and criminal cases. Janisha is passionate about helping survivors feel empowered throughout the legal process.

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**Patricia 'Trish' McKnight - Advocate/Mentor/Survivor/Author**

**“Today I am a thousand miles away from the person my parents created in their forced slavery, destructive neglect, and constant violence fueled by mental illness and substance abuse.”**

Ms. McKnight, lived the journey of survival patterns filled with drug use, alcohol, attempted suicide, parenting challenges; the constant chaos and life altering injuries that plagued more than thirty years of her life. Her history of relationships followed the pattern of tolerance until she took one last true chance to save her life. It was twenty years ago when she left her last abusive relationship to break the cycle and give her children a better home, a peaceful sense of life; a chance to create their own identity. Her goal back then was simply to be a better mom than she had been given; hoping love alone would change the influence of the abusive environments. It was seeing the lasting impact they suffered, and then how her grandchildren were being affected that she began focusing her energy towards researching the connections between the traumas and the survivor's life patterns. Today she is a voice in policy, standards of care, training law enforcement, healthcare, educators, and community members to recognize, report, and respond with trauma informed knowledge. She founded; Butterfly Dreams Alliance, NFP a community outreach charitable organization providing awareness, education and assistance for those affected by abuse, violence, sexual harm and human trafficking. 'Trish' is a Regional Ambassador of NAASCA, a member of Central Illinois Human Trafficking Task Force, End Demand Illinois, and collaborates with resources throughout her home state; as well pushing through legislation to update the Statute of Limitations for involuntary servitude/sexual servitude of a minor in Illinois.

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