

THE VOICE E-NEWS

Volume 1, Issue 1

June 2020

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Chair's Message

Every segment of our society remains impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Florida Bar's Government Lawyer Section (GLS) is no different.

We applaud the leadership of the Florida Supreme Court, The Florida Bar and the local court systems as they balance access to our court system with the public's legitimate health and safety concerns. Like every other member of The Florida Bar, GLS members have adjusted to working remotely, limited court access, social distancing, and dramatic changes to our professional and personal interactions.

The GLS comprises 855 members who work in various practice areas and positions related to local, state, and national government. Twenty-two of our members serve on the GLS executive council, the GLS leadership team. This edition of THE VOICE E-News highlights one such GLS member, Laura

Boeckman, the North Florida Bureau Chief of the Consumer Protection Division at the Office of the Attorney General.

The GLS continues to work closely with The Florida Bar and its staff to further the section's mission during the pandemic. The mission of promoting the professionalism and competence of our members, improving the delivery of legal services to all governmental entities, improving the administration of the legal system, and enhancing The Florida Bar's and the public's understanding of the unique needs of the government attorney. This past year our section's executive council completed several mission related initiatives that enhanced the value of section membership. Many members practice in the appellate law area.

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Judge Anthony Miller, Second Judicial Circuit, Florida.

2019-2020 Chair of the Government Lawyer Section.

Passing the Gavel to Chair-elect Jacek Stramski

Jacek Stramski will become the GLS Chair on June 18, 2020, during the Virtual Annual Convention. He serves as special counsel with the Florida Department of Revenue, and is an adjunct faculty member at the Florida State University. Prior to joining the Department, Mr. Stramski was an assistant attorney general with the Office of

the Attorney General, Consumer Protection Division, where he spearheaded the enforcement of injunctive and monetary awards in state and federal courts. He developed the Law School Outreach Initiative and along with creating a mentorship program for young government lawyers, looks forward to an exciting year as Chair.



GOVERNMENT LAWYER SPOTLIGHT

By Jacek
Stramski

Professionalism – in her words to law students is “how to treat opposing counsel, the court, their clients, and how to create and maintain their reputation as attorneys.”



Laura Boeckman, Esq.

The Government Lawyer Section of the Florida Bar is pleased to turn its spotlight on section member Laura Boeckman, the North Florida Bureau Chief of the Consumer Protection Division at the Office of the Attorney General. Laura, who manages a team of attorneys, investigators, and support staff in complex investigations and litigation related to violations of the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act and other consumer protection laws, seemed to be primed, if not always in orthodox ways,

from youth to pursue a career in public interest law. Growing up in Mansfield, Ohio, Laura picked up a respect for education, a knack for multitasking, and an appreciation for hard work from her mother, a Ph.D. nurse practitioner, and her father, a small business owner. She also developed an early interest in the law following one minor run in with law enforcement while in high school, after which her parents took her to an attorney to learn of all the consequences any such event might have on her life.

“Much to their chagrin,” Laura recalls, “I walked away from the meeting with a deep curiosity about and interest in the law.” A sophomore in high school, Laura decided to eventually go to law school, become an attorney, and help those who most needed access to the courts.

In college, Laura’s academic enthusiasm led to a double major in English Literature and Political Science and a minor in Chemistry. In a foreshadowing of the career to come, she also

spent a semester at American University in Washington, D.C., where she interned at the Legal Services Corporation and enjoyed big city life for the first time.

After graduation, Laura spent a year in Japan teaching English. The experience left her excited to continue her studies, which she completed at Indiana University with a JD and a Master’s in Public Affairs. She loved the intellectually stimulating nature of law and graduate school

courses, and was active in student organizations such as mock trial and the Public Interest Law Foundation, which she describes as a great organization for meeting other public interest lawyers and for fundraising to assist students with public interest fellowships.

Laura’s first legal job after law school was clerking for two years for the Hon. Harvey E. Schlesinger, a United States District Judge for the Middle District of Florida, where she

benefited from, and remains grateful for, the Judge’s teaching, mentorship, and fun working environment.

Following her clerkship, Laura worked as an attorney for Jacksonville Legal Aid under the “amazing guidance” of Lynn Drysdale, a nationally recognized consumer advocate, with a practice focused on foreclosure defense, debt collection defense, bankruptcy, and protecting vulnerable citizens with legal tools found in various

consumer protection statutes. She also started teaching legal research and writing at Florida Coastal School of Law, which she eventually joined as a full-time clinical professor. There, she shared her enthusiasm for consumer protection law with groups of 8-10 students, together representing indigent clients in a range of consumer matters, all the while emphasizing to her students the value of professionalism – in her words, “how to treat opposing counsel, the court, their clients, and how to create and maintain

their reputations as attorneys.”

From 2013, Laura has served in her current role as North Florida Bureau Chief of the Consumer Protection Division at the Office of the Attorney General. Recently, Laura’s work has been directly aimed at tackling an unfortunate aspect of the pandemic—price gouging. She notes that the “Consumer Protection Division is responsible for investigating and prosecuting violations of the price gouging law, and we have received thousands of

contacts from consumers.” She credits her team for quickly adapting to changed working conditions and for meeting the challenge, despite being in somewhat uncharted waters. “We have a lot of experience investigating price gouging during hurricanes,” said Laura, “but a pandemic is a state of emergency we have not dealt with before. So it has been an adjustment in how we look at and treat the complaints to make sure we are quickly addressing and stopping price gouging as quickly as we can. **Cont’d p. 4**

Chair's Message, cont'd

So GLS partnered with the Appellate Practice Section to create a joint GLS/Appellate Practice membership level. We also combined efforts with the Young Lawyers Division leadership, committing to promote each other's initiatives.

Law school outreach is a passion for GLS leadership. Last year we held our first lunch and learn law school panel at FSU College of Law. A standing room crowd of students eagerly discussed the value of working in the public sector. Prior

to the pandemic, there were several panels scheduled and proposed. GLS will continue to move forward with this initiative in the upcoming academic year. If you are interested in participating or even organizing a panel at your local law school, please let us know!

In addition, look for the upcoming three-part CLE webinar series featuring presentations on Marcy's Law, agency deference and administrative appeals. These and other initiatives are only possible thanks

to our engaged membership. There are many leadership opportunities and other ways you can help realize our shared mission of boosting the prominence of government lawyers across the state. Please attend the upcoming section meeting during the Florida Bar's Annual Meeting that will be held virtually on June 18, 2020. To find out more about this meeting and how you can get involved, please email me at abmilleresquire@gmail.com or visit the section website at www.flgovlawyer.org/.



Law School Outreach Initiative Kick-Off

GLS and FSU Law teamed up on October 28, 2019, to present a Lunch and Learn for law students on public service. The panel was composed of Leon County Circuit Judge and GLS-chair Anthony Miller, Administrative Law Judge and past-chair Francine Ffolkes, and Office of the Attorney General Special Counsel for Litigation Russell Kent, moderated by chair-elect Jacek Stramski. The panel spent an hour discussing career paths in the law and the

benefits and challenges of lawyering in the public service with a packed classroom of FSU law students. Among the topics covered was the importance of seeking out mentoring relationships. Although this may seem like a daunting task to many young lawyers, Judge Miller assuaged anxieties with a straightforward point. "Lawyers like to hear themselves talk," he quipped to chuckles from the panel and attendees, noting that many are in fact quite ap-

proachable and eager to help young lawyers as they start out their careers. "And, if you get a negative response from someone about mentoring you, do not get discouraged -- reach out to the next person." Other matters covered included the non-monetary value of public service lawyering for young attorneys, such as the opportunity to develop practical skills, and the benefits and difficulties of having a public entity as a client.

"Lawyers like to hear themselves talk" quipped Judge Anthony Miller.

This was the first panel of many that the GLS hopes to hold at Florida's various law schools, as the section starts a concerted initiative to reach out to future practitioners about the professional and personal rewards of lawyering on behalf of the public. However, this initiative cannot succeed without your help!

If you would like to be part of a panel on government lawyering at your local law school, please contact the GLS – we are very

excited to continue this important conversation with law students across the state, and hope you can join in.

Photo L to R: Jacek Stramski, Judge Anthony Miller, Judge Francine Ffolkes, Special Counsel Russell Kent, and Dean Nancy Benavides, Dean for Student Affairs.



**GOVERNMENT
LAWYER
SECTION OF THE
FLORIDA BAR**

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We are on the Web!
www.flgovlawyer.org

Mission of the Section.

The Government Lawyer Section is dedicated to promoting the professionalism and competence of its members; improving the delivery of legal services to all governmental entities; improving the administration of the legal system; and enhancing The Florida Bar's and the public's understanding of the unique needs of the government lawyer.

Remember to visit your Government Lawyer Section's [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page. The website contains lots of information about the Section. Look for dates and times of future meetings and minutes of past meetings. Find new CLE courses or CDs and materials on recent CLEs. Get involved with The Florida Bar by contacting members of your executive council through the website or email.

Laura Boeckman, Esq., cont'd

It is a testament to the hard work of our team that we have been able to quickly respond to so many of the complaints."

Laura describes her greatest professional reward in this role as receiving calls and correspondence from harmed consumers thanking her and her team for recovering funds or providing other help for which harmed consumers otherwise had little hope.

Laura's advice to young lawyers is that their greatest asset is their "reputation, and by extension, what you do on a day to day basis to cultivate it." In addition to adhering to norms of professionalism, she notes that it is important to give others the benefit of the doubt and avoid jumping to conclusions. She also urges young attorneys not to assume that a career in public interest law is out of reach, remarking that a

passion for the field can be a huge asset to anyone starting in that line of work.

Laura stresses that it is important for "government lawyers to be involved in bar associations and in as many other activities as possible" to ensure that the unique perspective of government lawyers is represented in these bodies. She follows her own advice -- Laura is a member of the Florida Bar Public Interest Law Section's Executive Council and a past chair of the Consumer Protection Law Committee, where she is vice-chair, a master in both the Chester Bedell and 1st DCA Inns of Court, the Federal Bar Association, the Jacksonville Bar Association, the Jacksonville Women Lawyers Association, and the Jacksonville Women's Network, and has previously been recognized with the Florida Bar Pres-

ident's Pro Bono Award for the Fourth Judicial Circuit and as the Florida Bar Consumer Protection Attorney of the Year.

We share Laura's sentiment on the importance of government lawyers making their voices heard within the profession. On behalf of the section, the Executive Council would like to thank Laura for sharing her unique perspective and path with the Voice and wish her many more successes as she continues serving the public interest.
