

An Interview With Kylie Lovett, Esq.

by Nicole P. Dyszlewski, Esq., MLIS and Meghan L. Hopkins, Esq.

Focus on the Future is a spotlight series where members of the *Rhode Island Bar Journal* Editorial Board interview attorneys who are newer to the Rhode Island Bar.

> **What is your current title and position?**

I am an Assistant Public Defender.

> **What do you actually do all day?**

My days are generally split in half. I have court every morning where I handle the courtroom's daily calendar. In the afternoon, I review and prepare my cases and meet with clients.

> **What is one thing you like about being in court and having a court-based practice?**

I really enjoy advocating for my clients. My practice is all criminal law, and much of the work is done in the trenches, so to speak. In order to zealously advocate for my clients, I need to be in court doing the work.

> **Based on Nicole's librarian sleuthing skills, it has been memorialized for all time on the internet that you once said, "I want to play soccer throughout my whole college experience. After college I would like to go and work for an animal medical research facility." When did you change your mind and want to become a public defender?**

That was my high school recruiting profile for soccer! I am from Florida originally and I went to undergrad as a biology major. My goal was to work in a medical research lab. After the second year of college, I grew tired of science classes and had way too much empathy to only work in a lab. I graduated with a neuroscience minor and a major in psychology. I changed my focus from medical research to counseling. I wanted to be a counselor in prisons. I was not able to get an internship in a prison during undergrad, so instead, I interned at a private defense firm and fell in love with the law. Mental health is in a state of such crisis in the field of criminal law so I am able to use my empathy and advocacy skills in my current position.

> **What are some of your long-term goals?**

A specific long-term goal is to work to revise the sex offender registration statute in Rhode Island. I wrote a paper on this topic while I was in law school, and I want to lobby for a statutory change. I would like to change the appeal process to be more similar to the process in Massachusetts – I think this would give individuals more incentives to engage in counseling and take the steps recommended by the court to rehabilitate.

More broadly, I want to continue working at the public defender's office. While I mostly work in district court, generally, the next step in the office is going to Courtroom 9.

> **We have heard a lot about the fact that there are fewer and fewer trials every year, but when we were scheduling this inter-**

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KYLIE LOVETT, ESQ.

view, you told us you have several trials in one day. Can you help explain this?

I have several trials scheduled each week. Not all cases go to full trial, but they need to be fully prepped and ready to go to trial. Sometimes my client is very adamant about going to trial throughout the process and then on the day of the trial change their mind. Sometimes we plan to go to trial and the complaining witness doesn't show up. My caseload varies, but I have in the neighborhood of 15-25 cases every day. I approach each case with the goal of resolving the matter in the best interest of my client. Some of my clients opt to enter into plea deals, while others are able to be dismissed or chose to take it to trial. It is important for the client to decide which route they want their case to take.

> **Can you tell us one thing you have learned while being a new attorney?**

Going into law school I watched so many movies about the law and my biggest takeaway from practicing is that law is not as adversarial as I thought it would be or as it is portrayed to be.

Criminal defense work requires an attorney to build relationships with prosecutors



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and judges in a nuanced way I didn't really appreciate before this job. Building these relationships is what is best for my clients and the system benefits from this high level of collegiality and respect.

> **How does your identity impact your work?**

I think my background informs my approach. I did not come from a background of law. My mom was a social worker and I came from a diverse, lower middle-class community. I think my clients trust me more because of my identity and experiences, it shows that at some level I am able to relate to their background. However, as a young female with tattoos, several of my clients have been skeptical that I am really an attorney or am capable of handling their case. Also, I identify as a member of the LGBTQ community and I think this particularly has helped me when I have clients who are members of the community because I can relate to them, which helps us build trust. I am comfortable sharing my sexual identity and background openly with clients if it comes up or is relevant to my representation.

> **What is one thing you would want us all to know about your client population?**

Just because our clients qualify for our services it doesn't mean they don't deserve adequate representation. There is an overwhelming caseload of charges that relate to poverty and these crimes tend to be stigmatized. Everyone deserves a defense and I hope the perception changes to acknowledge this. Many of our clients are impacted by mental health issues or addiction, which vary in terms of severity and type. Not a day goes by that I don't have a case involving mental illness and/or addiction. No matter their walk of life, everyone deserves to have an attorney who is willing to fight for them.

> **Who is your biggest inspiration inside or outside of law?**

My family has really inspired me to do this work. My mom was a social worker and from a very young age, my family was involved in the community working with foster children and other populations in need. This really impacted my mindset about wanting to help others and work with stigmatized populations. I was also very inspired by Professor Tara Allen at RWU Law. I hope to one day be even half the attorney and advocate that she is.

> **What do you do to de-stress?**

I play soccer in a few adult leagues and it helps to get my energy out. I am also a plant mom and I am currently keeping them all alive, or at least trying to. I think it's important, especially being at the public defender's office, to make time for myself and just relax. It is a very emotional job.

> **What is your favorite restaurant in Rhode Island?**

I really enjoy Mokban in Providence.

> **How have you chosen to decorate your office?**

I have a Harry Potter Slytherin banner hanging up as well as letters from clients, more plants, sticky notes with random to do lists, law books, and so many case files.

NEW!

Rhode Island Municipal Court Listing

The Rhode Island Bar Association recently created a Municipal Court Listing, similar to our popular Probate Court Listing. Bar staff will regularly update the listing to ensure posted information is correct. The Municipal Court Listing and the Probate Court Listing are available on the Bar's website at ribar.com by clicking on **FOR ATTORNEYS** on the home page menu and then clicking on **MUNICIPAL COURT INFORMATION** or **PROBATE COURT INFORMATION** on the dropdown menu. Both Listings are provided in a downloadable pdf format. Bar members may also increase the type size of the words on the Listing by using the percentage feature at the top of the page.

The Bar Association also posts a chart summarizing the preferences of Superior Court justices relating to direct communications from attorneys, and between attorneys and the justices' clerks which is updated yearly. The chart is available by clicking **MEMBERS ONLY** on the home page menu and then clicking **JUDICIAL COMMUNICATIONS**.



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