

An Interview with Kaylin Pelletier-Koenig, Esq.

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Focus on the Future is a new 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 a Staff Attorney at Operation Stand Down Rhode Island (OSDRI) which is a veteran-founded, veteran-run 503(c) non-profit organization that provides “wrap-around services” for veterans, military families, and currently enlisted service people. “Wrap-around services” is a broad term that could include food from our food pantry, clothing from our clothing shed, employment services, housing/rental assistance, and legal assistance.

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

I am one of four attorneys who work on a variety of matters such as screening new clients, pro bono work, legal work for reduced fees, criminal record expungement, family law, eviction work, social security hearings, and traffic tribunal cases. In the course of a day, I might be in client meetings, reviewing medical records, in administrative hearings, or in court proceedings. We get cases as referrals from the Providence VA Medical Center, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Treatment Court, and a network of community providers.

> **Who is your biggest role model in or out of the law?**

Definitely my father. My dad is the hardest working person. He is my best friend, my confidant, and my go-to for everything from job advice, to life advice, to marriage advice. He is one of the only people I have been able to count on. He is a single dad, business owner, and mechanic. My heart of gold comes from him.

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

I play with my 6-year-old, 50 pound black Labrador Retriever named Chevy. Although COVID has changed some things, I like to go to the shooting range and the beach. I also have dinner at my Gram’s every Monday night and have volunteered once a week for the last 9 years at the St. Charles Church Soup Kitchen in Providence. Time with my family and volunteering helps me to stay humble and appreciate all I have in my life.

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

I go through phases but I was fairly obsessed with Black Oak Kitchen and Drinks in Coventry. When my husband was deployed, I would take myself out to date night there!

> **Name one thing that you could not live without and why?**

My husband. My husband was deployed to Kuwait, Iraq, and Syria from January to Thanksgiving of 2020. It was hard for me but even harder for him. The 11 months or so he was gone is one of the hardest things we have ever gone through as a couple but it was his dream. He had so much instability growing up that it was my pleasure to support his dream to enlist as a paratrooper. I am so thankful to have him home and safe.

> **What do you find most rewarding about your job?**

I wanted to enlist in college but I have a medical condition which makes me unable to serve. This job is a way to give back. In law school, I was looking for ways to serve this community and started working at Rhode Island Legal Services where I worked with a few veterans. I can’t put on the uniform and serve in the traditional sense, but I can use my law degree to



KAYLIN PELLETIER-KOENIG, ESQ.

help others who can and have. The most rewarding part is when a veteran comes to me at his or her worst, dealing with homelessness or unemployment or legal issues, and you can help him or her to the point where he or she is happy and healthy and providing for him or herself. It makes me feel like Wonder Woman!

> **What do you think attorneys need to know when working with a veteran?**

You cannot be a lawyer or do your job in this country without veterans and their service. When veterans get home, they get cut loose into society with very little support. By the time they get to us as lawyers, they don’t just have legal issues, they have economic, social, housing, and family issues. Unfortunately, more often than not, we can’t just fix one legal issue we need to take a holistic approach, which is OSDRI’s model. Sometimes veterans can get a bad reputation, but they are just regular people. We need to have compassion and gratitude for them.

> **Finally, what do you think this country needs to do to better support its veterans?**

I have always been told that most veterans who commit suicide are actually already enrolled in the VA Healthcare System. The problem is that veterans are sometimes too proud to take the help available to them. We need to not only apprise them of the available services and resources, but we also need to ENCOURAGE them to use these services and destigmatize asking for help. They served our country; now it is our turn to serve them. That’s actually one of OSDRI’s mottos. We can only serve them if we encourage them and convince them they aren’t “weak” for needing help.



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