



Domestic Violence Awareness: A Survey of Critical Issues for Family Law Practitioners

In partnership with



Friday, October 31, 2025
9:00 AM – 1:30 PM Central

Virtual via Zoom

Approved for 4.5 hours of Texas MCLE, of which .75 is ethics

This course has been approved by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization for certification and recertification continuing legal education requirements for attorneys and paralegals in the following specialty fields:

Child Welfare Law (4.5 hours)
Family Law (4.5 hours)



Agenda

9:00 – 9:30 AM

Welcome and Legislative and Case Update

The Honorable Janet B. Heppard
Retired – Presiding Judge
387th State District Court
Adjunct Professor
University of Houston Law Center

9:30 – 10:00 AM

Protective Order Overview (TFC and CCP)

Melissa Cass Pickett
Associate
Jenkins & Kamin LLP

10:00 – 10:30 AM

Unique Challenges Related to Disability/Language Access/LGBTQ+

The Honorable Richard T. Bell
Associate Judge
387th District Court
Adjunct Professor
University of Houston Law Center

10:30 – 11:00 AM

Landlord/Tenant Rights in the Face of Family Violence

LéJoi R. Toliver
Managing Attorney – Fort Bend Office
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)

11:00 – 11:45 AM

Family Violence in the Age of Technology

Steven Bradley
Safety and Technology Expert
The OurFamilyWizard® Website

11:45 - 12:15 PM

Intersection of Family Violence and Immigration

Josephine Sorgwe
Director of Immigration & Civic Engagement
BakerRipley



Agenda

12:15 - 12:45 PM
(.5 ethics)

Dealing with High Maintenance Clients

The Honorable Barbara J. Stalder
Former Judge of the 280th Judicial District Court
Attorney at Law
Adjunct Professor
University of Houston Law Center

12:45 - 1:15 PM
(.25 ethics)

Attorney Risks/Safety Representing Family Violence Clients

Maisha Colter, LCSW, JD
Chief Executive Officer
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)

1:15 - 1:30 PM

Final Questions and Closing

BIOGRAPHIES



THE HONORABLE RICHARD T. BELL

*Associate Judge
387th District Court
Adjunct Professor
University of Houston Law Center*

Judge Richard T. Bell graduated with a Doctor of Jurisprudence from South Texas College of Law in May 1997 and earned a Bachelor of Arts Business Degree from Southwestern University in 1994. After graduation from law school, Judge Bell began concentrating his legal practice on family law, handling cases throughout the State of Texas. He maintained a successful legal practice handling complex property cases and child custody disputes for nearly twenty years. During his years of private practice, Judge Bell was regularly recognized

by the State Bar of Texas as a member of the Pro Bono College, an organization devoted to helping individuals that are unable to afford legal services.

In 2015, he accepted the position as the Associate Judge for the 387th District Court. Judge Bell is an active member in the legal field as well as the local community. He regularly speaks at continuing legal education courses, assisting lawyers to stay abreast of important changes in the law. Judge Bell currently serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center.

Judge Bell served on the State Bar of Texas Grievance Committee for the four years immediately prior to taking the bench. He is a former president of the Fort Bend County Bar Association as well as the Fort Bend County Dispute Resolution Center. In addition to his contributions to the legal field, Judge Bell is an active member of the local community. He regularly sits on the boards of local non-profit organizations and has held officer positions in many of those organizations. In 2022, he served as the president of the Exchange Club of Sugar Land and for several years he was the treasurer of the Sugar Land Little League. Judge Bell is passionate about serving the needs of others within his community.



STEVEN BRADLEY

*Safety and Technology Expert
The OurFamilyWizard® Website*

Steven Bradley brings a distinguished career in law enforcement with a specialization in investigating crimes against persons, including sexual assault, child abuse, domestic violence, human trafficking, and crimes against the elderly. His expertise led to a prestigious recruitment by the FBI, where he graduated with honors from the FBI Academy and served in a critical role investigating cyber-enabled crimes—ranging from cyberstalking and network intrusions to financial exploitation and the apprehension of child predators.

Steven later turned his focus toward strengthening collaboration between law enforcement and community-based victim advocacy organizations. Working closely with national and state domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, he led trainings on offender accountability, trauma-informed investigative practices, and multidisciplinary partnerships to improve outcomes for survivors.

Currently, Steven serves on the professional team at OurFamilyWizard, where he champions healthy, technology-assisted communication between co-parents navigating separation and divorce. He is internationally recognized for his leadership on the intersection of technology and abuse, and is a sought-after expert on topics including stalking, cyberstalking, digital forensics, and law enforcement's role in addressing intimate partner violence.

A seasoned international trainer with more than 28 years of experience, Steven is known for delivering real-world, practical education to legal professionals, judges, law enforcement, and mental health practitioners around the globe. He is also proud to be an Amazon Best-Selling Author, contributing his expertise to the critically acclaimed book *Divorce Amicably*, which highlights innovative approaches to supporting families in conflict through technology and legal collaboration.

BIOGRAPHIES



MAISHA COLTER, LCSW, JD

*Chief Executive Officer
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)*

Maisha Colter, LCSW, JD, has dedicated her professional life to advocating for the needs of children and families in crisis. Maisha has always found work that allows her to draw on the strengths of her educational training in social work and law.

Maisha attended school in New York, graduating from Syracuse University with dual bachelor's degrees in social work and public policy. After obtaining her master's degree in social work from New York University, Maisha was a licensed social worker in Brooklyn, New York, working tirelessly with children and families involved with the State's Child Protective Services Authority. She received her law degree from Rutgers University in 2001.

After relocating to Texas in 2003, she learned about AVDA and reached out to the Executive Director to volunteer and was instead hired as the agency's only staff attorney in 2004. She remained with the agency for almost 4 years and returned in 2012 to lead the distinguished staff of attorneys and paralegals charged with fighting on behalf of countless victims of domestic abuse in Harris, Fort Bend, Austin, Grimes, Waller and Washington Counties. She was selected after a nationwide search to serve as AVDA's Chief Executive Officer on August 1, 2019.



THE HONORABLE JANET B. HEPPARD

*Retired – Presiding Judge
387th State District Court
Adjunct Professor
University of Houston Law Center*

Judge Janet B. Heppard is retired as the presiding judge in the 387th State District (Family) Court in Fort Bend County, Texas. She is a graduate of the University of Houston (UHLC) with a joint JD/MBA degree after working as a geophysicist at Amoco Production Company in Houston, Texas prior to law school.

Judge Heppard worked in the clinical program at UHLC beginning in 1995, first as a staff attorney and later as director of the Civil Practice Clinic, becoming the Clinic Director in 2008 and a full Clinical Professor in 2019 before retiring in December 2020 to begin her judicial term. Judge Heppard retired from the bench in December 2024 and continues to teach at UHLC as an adjunct in the areas of family violence and Immigration and Family Law and to provide pro bono legal assistance to low-income members of the community.



MELISSA CASS PICKETT

*Associate
Jenkins & Kamin LLP*

Melissa Cass Pickett received her law degree from South Texas College of Law in 2007. In her final year as a law student, she was privileged to handle protective order hearings in the Harris County District Family Courts with a third-year student bar card sponsored by the Harris County District Attorney's Office. After her licensure in 2008, Melissa provided family law services to indigent survivors of family and dating violence at the non-profit agency Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, then transitioned in 2013 to private practice representing clients in divorce, paternity, child support, and protective order cases.

Melissa holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from the University of Houston. In addition to her law practice, she recently completed two three-year terms on Panel 5 of the State Bar Grievance Committee, which considers complaints involving lawyer conduct. She is currently the Continuing Legal Education Chair for the Northeast Harris County Bar Association. Melissa believes that zealous advocacy in the courtroom is only one component of practicing law, and that it is equally important to have compassion and understanding for the circumstances and challenges that clients face in their family law matters.

Outside of her work hours, Melissa enjoys spending time with her family, as well as gardening, baking, and restoring vintage cast iron.

BIOGRAPHIES



JOSEPHINE SORGWE

*Director of Immigration & Civic Engagement
BakerRipley*

Josephine Sorgwe is the Director of Immigration & Civic Engagement at BakerRipley. Josephine completed her undergraduate studies at Texas A&M University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. After completing her undergraduate studies, she attended the University of Houston Law Center where she received her Doctor of Jurisprudence. From 2015 to 2021, Josephine worked as a clinical supervising attorney at the University of Houston Law Center Immigration Clinic.

Josephine has worked at BakerRipley since 2021 and has served as director since 2024. Currently, she oversees a robust team of attorneys, DOJ accredited representatives, and social workers to provide *pro bono* legal and social services to immigrants in the Greater Houston area. In addition, she oversees a program dedicated to civic education, leadership training, and voter engagement. Josephine also serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center.



THE HONORABLE BARBARA J. STALDER

*Former Judge of the 280th Judicial District Court
Attorney at Law
Adjunct Professor
University of Houston Law Center*

Barbara J. Stalder is a seasoned attorney and nationally recognized expert in domestic violence law, with a career spanning over three decades dedicated to advocacy, education, and justice. She began her legal journey as an Equal Justice Works Fellow, where she founded a nonprofit organization focused on representing children in cases involving abuse, neglect, and family violence.

Barbara went on to serve as an attorney with Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA), providing critical legal support to individuals escaping violent relationships through protective orders, divorce, and custody proceedings. Her commitment to empowering survivors led her back to her alma mater, the University of Houston Law Center, where she spent eight years as a Clinical Supervising Attorney in the Civil Clinic, mentoring law students in live-client representation and courtroom practice.

Transitioning into private practice, Barbara specialized in high-conflict family law and mediation, earning a reputation for her skillful handling of complex cases. In 2018, she was elected to serve as the Presiding Judge of the 280th District Court—Texas's Domestic Violence Court—where she presided for four years, championing justice for survivors and families in crisis. After her tenure on the bench, Barbara returned to AVDA as Managing Attorney, leading a team of attorneys and paralegals in providing comprehensive legal services to victims of domestic violence. As of May 2025, she resumed private practice and continues to serve as an Adjunct Professor at UH Law, shaping the next generation of legal professionals.

Outside the courtroom, Barbara is a devoted wife to Fred of over 32 years, a proud pet parent to her beloved furkids, and an enthusiastic supporter of her Super Bowl Champion Kansas City Chiefs.



LÉJOI R. TOLIVER

*Managing Attorney – Fort Bend Office
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)*

A native Houstonian, LéJoi Toliver received her undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin and her Juris Doctor from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University. She is licensed in the State of Texas and has practiced law for over 15 years. In 2021, she joined Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA), a nonprofit organization that has served the Houston community for over 45 years. AVDA's mission is to end family violence by advocating for the safety and self-determination of victims, promoting accountability for abusers, and fostering a community response to abuse. Ms. Toliver currently serves as the

Managing Attorney of the Fort Bend County office, where survivors have access to free legal representation in protective orders, divorce, child support, child custody, and adoption cases. Prior to joining AVDA, Ms. Toliver maintained a private practice focused on family and civil disputes, child welfare law, and mediation/alternative dispute resolution.

For more information about upcoming events and programs at the University of Houston Law Center:



www.law.uh.edu/cle

For more information about Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA):

www.avda.org



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