



**THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
MIDDLESEX DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

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Boston Attorney Receive Award For Outstanding Service At Middlesex District Attorney's Office

WOBURN – Boston attorney Kendra L. Berardi was presented with the Middlesex District Attorney's 209A Pro Bono Initiative Award at a ceremony held in Woburn, Middlesex District Attorney Gerry Leone announced today. Ms. Berardi was honored for her exemplary service to the office of the Middlesex District Attorney and to victims of domestic violence,

The 209A Pro Bono program was established by DA Leone in 2008. This first of its kind public private partnership between the MDAO and several Boston-area law firms provides free legal assistance to victims of domestic violence during the restraining order process. The award is presented to an attorney who has dedicated time to helping victims of domestic violence through this partnership and program.

Berardi is an attorney with Robinson & Cole LLP in Boston and serves as a volunteer attorney as part of the Pro Bono program.

“Kendra has dedicated her valuable time as a volunteer attorney assisting victims in obtaining restraining orders since May of 2012, often having to navigate the sensitivities and cultural dynamics of many cases,” Middlesex District Attorney Leone said. “Restraining orders are critical for victims of domestic violence to be empowered to protect themselves by reducing barriers against disclosure and allowing victims to extricate themselves from abusive relationships. We are grateful for Kendra's extensive contributions to this important program.”

The annual Middlesex District Attorney's Awards Ceremony was held on January 10, 2013 at Woburn Memorial High School in Woburn. The office has a proud legacy of exemplary service to the people of Middlesex County, and the series of awards are named in honor of many of the former members of the office.

Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley, former Middlesex District Attorney, was in attendance to present an award named in her honor.

The MDAO Pro-Bono Attorney Program was created to address a significant gap in the way that domestic violence victims are served during the restraining order process. Specifically,

because a restraining order is a civil document, assistant district attorneys are unable to represent victims during that process. Many of those victims are unable to afford an attorney as, oftentimes, it is the abuser who controls the household finances. These restraining order hearings are critical, as they not only work to assure that the abuser cannot come in contact with the victim, but also frequently address other important issues such as assuring continued child support, utility payments, mortgage payments and health insurance payments. To address this problem, the MDAO partners with law firms to identify victims and provide free representation. Since its inception, the program has served more than 100 victims, with a 97 percent success rate of cases resolved in favor of the victim.

Participating law firms include: Proskauer Rose, Cooley Manion Jones, Brody Hardoon Perkins & Kesten, Weil, Gotshal & Manges, Melick Porter, Robinson & Cole Rich May, Greenberg Traurig, Holland & Knight, and Wilmer Hale. To date, 54 attorneys have participated in the pro-bono program, all of whom have received extensive training and support. Nine attorney mentors from legal service and private practice provide training, guidance and technical assistance to the attorneys.

In 2011, there were approximately 30,000 restraining orders filed by victims of domestic violence in the Commonwealth. In Middlesex County alone, there were approximately 5,000 restraining orders filed by victims. Of that number, the MDAO community-based victims advocates estimate that approximately half of the victims did not return for a 10-day hearing to extend the restraining order for the full year. A significant reason for that is that many of them did not have legal representation. Since the inception of the Domestic Violence Pro Bono Attorney Program, 90 percent of victims referred to the program returned to court for restraining order hearings.

Any law firm that is interested in joining this program is asked to call the District Attorney's Director of Community Partnerships Shawn MacMaster at 781-897-8462.

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