ILLINOIS STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

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The Catalyst

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Standing Committee on Women and the Law

Chair's Column

BY DEANNA HOYT

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF the Women & the Law Members for an incredible year. It has been my honor working with all of you over the 12 months. We have done some great things through all your incredible dedication and hard work.

It is always appreciated when our Newsletter Editors do not have to spend half their time chasing members down to get articles in for our publications. The amount of articles and the content this year were great.

Our book drive collected hundreds of books and had many monetary donations. Through Bernie's Book Bank, Look. It's My Book!, United Way of Decatur & Mid Illinois - Dolly Parton Imagination Library, and Metro East Literacy Project, we were able to help communities across the State of Illinois.

Our committee also put on two great CLE programs: (1) ADHD: Its Rise in Diagnosis of Women and the Impact on the Profession and the Professional Woman; and (2) Trauma – How to Successfully Identify, Manage, and Excel as an Attorney When Faced with Traumatic Events in the Workplace.

Our International Women's Day Tea sold out in record time, and we had to close registration a month before the event. Additionally, the surplus funds we raised allowed us to make Trailblazing Through the Law: Lifting as We Climb a free event.

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Equal Rights Amendment Update: Where Are We Now?

BY CINDY G. BUYS

THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT (ERA) provides: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

After several years of inactivity with respect to ratification of the ERA, three states, Nevada in 2017, Illinois in 2018, and Virginia in 2020 became the 36th, 37th and 38th States to ratify the ERA. Illinois did so with the support and encouragement of the ISBA.[1] With Virginia's ratification, three-quarters of the States had ratified the amendment as required by Article V of the U.S. Constitution, clearing the way for the ERA to become the 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. However, during the first Trump Administration, the Department of Justice issued an opinion to the national

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Chair's Column

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The Tea has become so big that the IBF is creating a WATL fund, so going forward, we can start directing surplus funds to organizations across the state that are supporting women and children. I look forward to our members continuing to find new ways to make positive impacts in our communities.

Finally, Trailblazing Through the Law: Lifting as We Climb was a fun and exciting day with all that we had planned. The tours of the Capitol Building and the Illinois Supreme Court building all had a great number of people registered. The night culminated in a reception for the Illinois Supreme Court Justices. It was a great triumph to finally get this event off the ground after years of planning. It was great to see many of our members there!

Thank you so much to everyone for all the hard work that was put into making WATL 2024-2025 amazing. Through all your work, we are able to successfully execute some amazing events. ■

The Catalyst

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Equal Rights Amendment

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Archivist taking the position that the ERA ratifications were not valid and instructing the Archivist not to certify and publish the ERA as the 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which the national Archivist has not done.[2]

Congress adopted a joint resolution that sent the ERA to the states for ratification in 1972 in accordance with Article V procedures. There is no time limit for ratification of amendments set forth in Article V. However, Congress included a time limit for the ratifications of the ERA in its 1972 resolution, giving rise to arguments that these last three ratifications came too late as they were after the time limit.

At its Annual Meeting in Chicago in July 2024, the American Bar Association (ABA) adopted a resolution recognizing the ERA as the 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution because it satisfies all requirements of Article V of the U.S. Constitution.[3] The ABA did so with support of the ISBA.[4] The ABA Resolution rejects the argument that the ratifications are time barred because the time bar is not part of Article V of the Constitution and because it was contained in the text of a congressional resolution and not in the language of the amendment itself.[5]

Members of Congress also continued to work towards recognition of the ERA as part of the Constitution. During the 118th Congress (2023-24), both the House[6] and Senate[7] introduced a joint resolution providing that "the Equal Rights Amendment, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, was ratified by three-fourths of the states and is therefore a valid constitutional amendment, regardless of any time limit that was in the original proposal." However, the Joint Resolution never made it out of committee for a vote by the Congress.

ERA supporters urged former President Biden to reverse the DOJ policy and instruct the Archivist to certify the ERA as the 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. As one of his last acts in office, President Biden issued a "Statement from President Joe Biden on the Equal Rights Amendment" on January 17, 2025, in which he stated the following:

> I have supported the Equal Rights Amendment for more than 50 years, and I have long been clear that no one should be discriminated against based on their sex. We, as a nation, must affirm and protect women's full equality once and for all.
> On January 27, 2020, the Commonwealth of Virginia became the 38th state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. The American Bar Association (ABA) has recognized that the Equal Rights Amendment has cleared all necessary hurdles to be formally added to the Constitution as the 28th Amendment. I agree with the ABA and with leading legal constitutional scholars that the Equal Rights Amendment has become part of our Constitution.
> It is long past time to recognize the will of the American people. In keeping with my oath and duty to Constitution and country, I affirm what I believe and what three-fourths of the states have ratified: the 28th Amendment is the law of the land, guaranteeing all Americans equal rights and protections under the law regardless of their sex.

Despite this statement, President Biden did not instruct the Archivist to take action to certify the ERA. And it is not expected that President Trump will change his view that the ERA is not part of the Constitution.

Adoption of the ERA remains vital. Despite the passage of more than 240 years since the adoption of the U.S. Constitution and ceaseless effort, women are not expressly mentioned anywhere in the Constitution. When the Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment was ratified, the country was focused on issues of racial equality. While the U.S. Supreme Court has expanded the scope of equal protection to include gender equality, not all Supreme Court justices agree that it should be expanded beyond its original purpose to apply to issues other than race. Given the current Supreme Court's focus on the historical meaning of the Constitution, it is possible that gains for gender equality will be reversed.8 In addition, even though gender equality is currently recognized under the Fourteenth Amendment, gender discrimination is subjected to intermediate scrutiny rather than strict scrutiny, making it easier for governmental bodies to discriminate on the basis of gender. Adopting the ERA will help to ensure that women are recognized as equals under the law and their rights are protected.

Work must continue to finish the process of adding the ERA to the U.S. Constitution. To avoid further legal wrangling, action by Congress is needed to remove the time limit from its prior resolution and recognize the ERA as the 28th Amendment. ■

Cindy G. Buys is a Professor of Law at the SIU Simmons Law School where she teaches Constitutional Law among other subjects. She also is an active member of the ISBA serving on the Human and Civil Rights Section Council, the International and Immigration Law Section Council, and as an ISBA delegate to the ABA House of Delegates.

This article was originally published in Human and Civil Rights (April 2025, Vol. 51, No. 3), the newsletter of ISBA's Section on Human and Civil Rights.

1. *See* Lori Levin, Chair's Column, The Catalyst, vol. 24 no. 1 (Oct. 2018), https://www.isba.org/committees/women/newsletter/2018/10/chairscolumn.
2. Illinois joined Virgina and Nevada in a lawsuit seeking an order of mandamus instructing the Archivist to certify the ERA as the 28th Amendment to the Constitution, but the lawsuit was not successful in part due to the time limit for ratifications Congress included in its resolution.
3. Big News! The ABA Approved Resolution 601 on Aug. 6, 2024, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/women/initiatives_awards/era/#:~:text=The%20ABA%20approved%20Resolution%20601,publication%20of%20the%2028th%20Amendment.
4. ISBA Supports ABA Resolution to Recognize ERA as 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Illinois Bar News, July, 15, 2024, https://www.isba.org/barnews/equalrightsamendment.
5. See ABA Resolution.
6. H.J. Res. 25, 118th Cong., (2023-24).
7. S.J. Res 39, 118th Cong., (2023-24).
8. In fact, many would argue that women's rights have already been reversed with the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. 215 (2022), removing U.S. constitutional protection for a women's right to choose to terminate a pregnancy, and the even more recent reversals of longstanding federal nondiscrimination policies by the second Trump Administration. *See* Executive Order Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (Jan. 21, 2025), https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-illegal-discrimination-and-restoring-merit-based-opportunity/.

Annual Tea 2025


Annual Tea
Welcome
to the Annual Tea Celebrating
Women's History Month

Abortion Bans: How Post-*Dobbs* Restrictions Will Impact States Without Their Own Abortion Limits

BY OLIVIA ST. CLAIR LONG AND MK CLAYTON

IN 2022, ANYA COOK'S PREGNANCY took a devastating turn when her water broke at 16 weeks. A doctor in Broward County, Florida, informed her that her pregnancy was not viable and that she would miscarry.[1] But Florida's abortion laws forced her to return home and wait for her condition to worsen.[2]

"I needed care, but my state's abortion restrictions kept it from me," Cook shared during her speech at the Democratic National Convention. "I miscarried in a bathroom. I lost half the blood in my body." Tragically, Anya Cook came close to losing her life because of Florida's restrictive abortion laws. Now, Florida has enacted even stricter restrictions.

Before the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, Florida served as a relative safe haven for those in the South seeking abortion care. But now the state has enacted a near-total abortion ban. Florida's new six-week abortion ban is pushing an already overburdened healthcare system to the brink.[3] For many in the Southeastern U.S., access to abortion has now become a logistical and financial challenge—creating what can only be described as an "abortion desert."

Florida's New Six-Week Ban: Key Details

As of May 1, 2024, Florida prohibits abortions after six weeks from a person's last menstrual cycle. This early cutoff is particularly problematic because many people don't even realize they're pregnant by the six-week mark—one in three women report not knowing they're pregnant until after the six-week window has passed.[4]

Patients seeking an abortion in Florida are also required to schedule two in-person appointments, spaced at least 24 hours apart.[5] While the law includes limited exceptions for cases of rape, incest, and human trafficking up to 15 weeks gestation, those exceptions come with their own set of hurdles. Survivors of rape, incest, or trafficking must provide documentation, such as a police report or medical records, before they can access an

abortion.[6] This requirement places many survivors in a traumatic and impossible position: either report their assault and risk further violence, or carry a rapist's child to term. The law also includes limited exceptions for fatal fetal abnormalities and for the life of the mother.[7]

Florida's restrictive measures took effect alongside an abortion-related ballot measure. Amendment 4, which sought to restore abortion access up to fetal viability,[8] was supported by 57% of voters but ultimately fell short of the 60% supermajority needed to pass.[9] This marks the first defeat of a pro-abortion rights measure in the United States since the Supreme Court's *Dobbs*[10] decision in 2022.

How Restrictive Abortion Bans Ripple Across States

The impact of restrictive abortion bans extends far beyond the borders of Southeastern U.S. states. Neighboring and even distant states without such restrictions are already seeing significant ripple effects.

1. Increased Demand for Abortion Services

With states like Florida enacting strict abortion bans, and large swaths of the Southern U.S. having total or near-total bans, many people will be forced to travel out of state to access care. For example, those seeking an abortion in Florida after the six-week cutoff will have to travel hundreds of miles to North Carolina, the next closest state where abortion is legal after six weeks. North Carolina allows abortion until 12 weeks, but the closest clinic. Located in Charlotte, NC, is over 500 miles away from Florida's northern border.

This surge in demand for services in states with fewer restrictions is placing a strain on healthcare systems that were already stretched thin. Clinics in states like North Carolina, Virginia, Missouri, and Illinois will face overcrowding, longer wait times, and increased financial pressures as they try to accommodate out-of-state patients seeking abortion care.[11]

2. Public Health Risks

Restrictive abortion laws also pose significant public health risks. When people can't access safe, legal abortions in their home states, they may resort to unsafe methods or delay the procedure until they can travel to another state. Delaying an abortion can increase health risks, especially as pregnancy progresses. States that allow later-stage abortion care will bear the burden of managing the higher costs and risks associated with these more complex procedures.

Restrictive abortion laws disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including low-income individuals, people of color, and young people.[12] These groups may face additional barriers such as high travel costs, time off work, and the challenges of finding temporary housing while seeking care out of state.

3. Shifts in Migration and Political Landscape

Over time, we may see changes in migration patterns, with individuals seeking to relocate to more liberal states where they can access abortion services more easily. This could lead to shifts in the demographic makeup and political leanings of both restrictive and non-restrictive states, further deepening the divide between red and blue states.

Looking Beyond State Lines

While restrictive abortion laws in states like Florida may reduce the number of abortions performed within their borders, the effects are felt well beyond state lines. From healthcare access to political dynamics, the consequences of these laws ripple out to neighboring states and beyond, influencing both public health and social landscapes in ways that are complex and far-reaching.

Ultimately, abortion bans don't just impact the states that implement them—they create challenges for neighboring states, patients, and healthcare providers, underscoring the need for nationwide access to reproductive healthcare. ■

1. C.A. Bridges, *Florida woman describes near-death from state abortion law at DNC. Who is Anya Cook?, Tallahassee Democrat (August 22, 2024)*, https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/politics/elections/2024/08/22/dnc-anya-cook-florida-abortion-law/74911640007/.
2. *Id.*
3. Stephanie Colombini, *Florida's 6-week abortion ban is now in effect, curbing access across the south, NPR (May 1, 2024)*, https://www.npr.org/2024/05/01/1247990353/florida-6-week-abortion-ban-south.
4. Lauren Ralph, *One in three people learn they're pregnant past six weeks' gestation*, Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH) (November 5, 2021), https://www.ansirh.org/research/research/one-three-people-learn-theyre-pregnant-past-six-weeks-gestation.
5. Holly Honderich, *New Florida six-week abortion ban will be felt beyond the state,* BBC (May 1, 2024), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68925009.
6. *Id.*
7. *Id.*
8. Shefali Luthra, *Florida abortion rights measure is the first to fail since the end of Roe,* The 19th (November 5, 2024), https://19thnews.org/2024/11/florida-abortion-ballot-measure-results/.
9. *Id.*
10. *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. 215 (2022).
11. Shia Kapos, *America's abortion access divide is reshaping blue-state border towns,* Politico (January 11, 2023), https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/11/abortion-access-blue-state-border-towns-00077367.
12. Jay Lau, *Abortion restrictions have led to negative health impacts, say panelists,* Harvard School of Public Health (July 1, 2024), https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/abortion-restrictions-have-led-to-negative-health-impacts-say-panelists/#:~:text=The%20study%20found%20that%20people,conditions%2C%20trauma%2C%20or%20abuse.

Member Spotlight: Debra L. Thomas

BY JESSICA DURKIN

I HAD THE PLEASURE OF GETTING to interview new Women & the Law ("WATL") member Debra L. Thomas. We first met when I joined the Young Lawyers Division Section Council ("YLD"), and Debra was Chair of one of the most challenging committees---the Newsletter. She even won the Newsletter Editor Service Award for her contributions. Debra and the other veteran YLD members welcomed me with open arms and made the ISBA a fun place to be. Debra has always taken on difficult tasks within the ISBA. She has planned Continuing Legal Education ("CLE") topics and organized speakers for the Solo and Small Firm Nuts and Bolts conference, as well as YLD seminars on topics like "Hanging Out a Shingle: A Primer on Building Your Own Practice" Now, as a new member of WATL, Debra has jumped in headfirst with her contributions to WATL's CLEs. She was able to find two specialist speakers featured in WATL's 2025 CLE programs, and Debra moderated one of the programs. Debra is one of the members of the ISBA who makes sure stuff gets done, and we all reap the benefits from her efforts.

Debra L. Thomas

In addition to all of Debra's contributions to the ISBA, she has her Master's Degree in Education. She combines her passion for law and education in her career at Romanucci & Blandin. She is the firm's managing attorney and has worked to create a CLE program within the firm, helping plan and present professional development programming to the attorneys and staff at the office.

With her sense of humor, kindness, industriousness, and dedication to the

Illinois State Bar Association, WATL is lucky to have Debra Thomas as a new member. Find out more about Debra through the questions below.

What inspired you to become a lawyer?

I wanted to be able to make a difference and make change but do it in the right way. I had seen many protests in college, and I knew while that was one way to make change, as a career, I could use the law to make change also. One of the reasons I started in criminal defense was because it let me fight for the person who didn't always have someone in their life who was fighting for them. I was able to help do that. This is also what I like about working at a plaintiff firm now, where we handle civil rights and other personal injury and medical negligence cases. Not only do we fight for justice for the individual, but we can also use the law to make real change in the law.

What made you want to join WATL? What other involvement do you have in the ISBA?

I have been involved in the ISBA for more than 20 years, having started as a brand-new lawyer. As a member of the YLD, I edited the newsletter for 10 years, coordinated countless CLE programs, and created social events to help members connect with each other and law students. I was an elected member of the Assembly as a young lawyer and also a member of the Traffic Laws & Courts Section, ultimately becoming Chair of the Council. I learned quickly that I enjoyed being part of the ISBA and always wanted to use my membership to help other lawyers, which is why I have been a part of the Members Services committee and the Solo and Small Firm Conference planning committee for years. It is from my involvement in these committees and sections that I knew I wanted to join WATL – I wanted to grow my involvement and start to help the ISBA, and especially women lawyers, through WATL. WATL is involved in so many fundraising and networking activities. I think all are fabulous and important to the enhancement of the profession, and I am thrilled to be a part of the group in my own small way. I am excited to grow with WATL and start to do more.

What are some of your favorite things to do outside of work?

My husband and I have a very active 13-year-old son who keeps me on my toes, as well as a Cavapoo puppy. I am always busy with them when not working. You can find me on walks, seeing friends, or driving my son to fencing classes… or watching Young Sheldon or other fun sitcoms with him.

Who is the most influential woman in your life?

Cliché – but my mom. She worked hard to make sure my sister and I did all the activities we wanted, but also focused on school, community, and service. She taught me patience and perseverance. She would sit with me for hours when I was stuck on schoolwork or stressed or nervous about tests. She taught me to believe in myself and give myself the time I needed to succeed at the task in front of me.

Any good books, TV shows, or movies that you've recently read or watched and want to recommend?

I love TV and movies, watching all genres. I listen to books on my way to work every day. I loved "The Women" by Kristin Hannah, and also "The Personal Librarian" and "The Other Einstein" by Marie Benedict.

Are there any legal issues involving women that you are interested in promoting/addressing or otherwise becoming involved in/are passionate about?

All rights for women are important – more important than ever – and there are too many to discuss. I think healthcare access for women, as well as education, top my list. And while not a legal issue, I think something we can all do without it being political or needing to fight for it, is mentorship – women need to be strong mentors to other young women, so they can, in turn, advance and give back and help grow the next generation of amazing women. ■

Getting to Know Her: An Interview with Olivia St. Clair Long

BY KAT DELGADO

OLIVIA ST. CLAIR LONG IS ONE of our new members of the Standing Committee on Women & the Law. Olivia is as smart and practical as she is creative, and it's an absolute pleasure to know her.

Olivia grew up in Southern California as an avid theater kid with a beautiful voice in an athletic family. She eventually found her own sport, rowing, which brought her to the University of Texas on an athletic scholarship. Her mom has worked as a therapist with her own practice for much of her life, giving Olivia family law adjacent experience beginning in her teen years. When Olivia graduated from the University of Chicago Law School in 2009, she stayed in the Chicago area for a job, but that job introduced her to the lovable Givonna, the woman who would become her wife, so here she stayed.

Olivia started out in big law, working first in commercial and then in trust litigation, gaining valuable litigation experience while she volunteered for the Domestic Violence Legal Clinic (DVLC), providing free civil legal assistance to low-income individuals in Cook County until O. Long Law LLC was born in October 2017. Olivia's upbringing and volunteer work made family law and litigation a natural fit.

Leadership and business ownership have been where Olivia has flourished, and she has built a firm that prides itself on being "as fierce as you need them to be." When she first chose to go out on her own and form O. Long Law LLC, she was able to finally become the person everyone begged her to be. She honed her management and delegation skills that had eluded her as an associate attorney and finally came into her own. Business ownership is not for everyone, but Olivia enjoys the challenge. Olivia believes that being a leader of people requires serving the people you lead, and she embodies that, thriving under pressure. Olivia strives to create a work environment where leaders hold their boundaries, and the staff feel supported.

Olivia St. Clair Long

Olivia saw the widespread issue of training associate attorneys, which zaps partners' already limited time and law firm revenue and was able to work together with Ann to expand the existing paralegal framework to benefit litigation associates. When Olivia sees a problem, her creative brain puzzles on the solution. It's part of what makes her an outstanding litigator. Olivia's proudest achievement is the creation of Litigator Launch Pad, which is a collaboration with Ann Pearson, founder of Paralegal Boot Camp.

As a member of the relatively small domestic relations community in and around Cook County, being able to have synergetic relationships with colleagues, workshop ideas to grow our boutique legal practices, be mentored and to mentor young attorneys takes center stage in Olivia's life. Where she has really shone is in her participation in the annual benefit show of the Women's Club of Evanston (WCE), the "Revue" where she acted as Creative Director in 2024. The Revue is a longstanding tradition where WCE members showcase their talents and write, direct, choreograph, and perform a musical comedy filled with parodies in the historic clubhouse ballroom. The Revue is a net benefits show, so all the funds raised go back into organizations supporting the Evanston community. ■

Maaria Mozaffar: Someone You Should Know

BY MONA ELGINDY

I RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to sit down and interview one of my mentors, Maaria Mozaffar, who has been trailblazing across the State of Illinois in her role as a legislative advocate and civil rights attorney. Her successes have served not only the women of Illinois, but so many others, and I got to talk with her about her most recent accomplishments.

The day after I interviewed Maaria, I did not expect to find her on the local news, but there she was, describing a bill that she had been working on for three years being passed in Illinois. The "Faith by Plate Act" was signed into law on March 21, 2025, becoming the first law of its kind in the nation. This law mandates state-run facilities such as schools, hospitals, and correctional facilities to offer Halal and Kosher meals to those that they serve. She partnered with Jewish faith groups to make this possible, and it's just one example of what Maaria has been doing to bridge gaps, large and small, among communities throughout Illinois.

Maaria Mozaffar

Mona: Maaria, I'm so thrilled to be able to highlight some of your work, but let's start with how you came to practice law in the first place. When did you first know you wanted to be a lawyer?

Maaria: Let's start really basic. I knew when I was very young. When kids were skipping the line for ice cream at lunch, I got used to advocating for others, and it became a natural habit. I focused on being able to advocate for those who could not advocate for themselves. I remember in college, a student who was wrongly arrested for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was from Somalia, spoke little English, and had come for pharmacy school. His treatment bothered me so much, and as a student and student body president at the time, I was able to advocate for him. It showed me how important it is to have people in your corner.

Mona: Can you share your professional background and how you got to what you are doing today?

Maaria: After graduating from law school, I was fortunate enough to work with great advocacy organizations that opened my eyes to the different places where legal advocacy is needed. I clerked for the Shriver Center on Poverty Law and joined the Chicago Committee for Human Rights Watch. I served as Legal Policy Advisor for several community organizations. I also opened my own practice to help advocate for issues from a legal and policy lens. I began drafting legislation and mediating conflicts (family, professional, and personal) and found that the core issue to resolve conflicts rested on one key factor: dignity. Everyone wants to be treated fairly. As lawyers, we have a responsibility to level the playing field for all people.

Mona: 2024 was a big year for you, and I know much of that work has just recently hit the headlines in 2025. Can you share with us the work you have been doing and what has transpired recently from that work?

Maaria: I'm humbled to share that to date, all the legislations I have drafted have become law (over a dozen). I think lawyers are trained to be great problem solvers. Instead of just arguing the law, lawyers can also conceptualize the law. That is the most powerful piece for me.

In 2024, I specifically worked on highlighting the hate crime against a 6-year-old Palestinian American, Wadee Al Fayoumi. On the federal level, I wrote a resolution (sponsored by Senator Durbin) on the issue of hate crimes and dehumanization and organized a Senate Congressional Hearing with Senate Durbin's office on Hate Crimes suffered by the Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian community that have resulted in death and bodily harm, since October 7, 2023. The Resolution unanimously passed the Senate. Following, I met with President Biden at the White House with Wadee Al Fayoumi's mother, Hanan Shaheen, to discuss the dehumanization of all people, political rhetoric, and hate crimes.

Mona: What do you have planned for 2025?

Maaria: I am focused on how to address Digital Dopamine addiction through legislation and reigning in tech companies that make a profit off of our children and screens.

Mona: Do you have any advice for attorneys out there?

Maaria: It's such a special job to advocate for people through institutions and systems that seem insurmountable for many. Expand your legal skills to help as many people as you can and get really good at learning as you go. Expand your skill set beyond the law, too. Whether you are in the corporate, civil, or criminal

realm of law, the capacity to make an impact from the legal, advocacy, and policy lens is huge. We have been trained to read the fine print and see the birds' eye view at the same time, so use it.

Mona: Outside of your professional work, what do you keep busy with?

Maaria: My family; being a mother, which has been my greatest blessing; and triathlons. Most of my ideas on advocacy come when I am present.

Mona: Thank you, Maaria, for the work you have done and what you continue to do. Any final words to share with us on lessons you have learned?

Maaria: I do take cues for how I am to use my skills next. That's what I focus on. It's cliche. I look forward, but am grateful for the past slip-ups – they are necessary for you to improve your skills.

Here is a link to some of Maaria's other accomplishments in the legislative space: https://maariamozaffar.com/legislative-victories/. ■

Women & the Law's Book Drive: 492 Books Collected for Young Readers in Illinois

BY LAURA CASTAGNA

LITERACY IS THE SINGLE MOST important skill a child needs to be successful, yet many children lack access to books of their own. In an effort to promote book ownership and help children create pathways to success through engagement with text, the Women & the Law ("WATL") Committee organized a book drive to coincide with ISBA's 2024 Midyear Meeting. From November 2024 until the Midyear Meeting, the WATL Committee invited its members and the greater ISBA membership to collect new and gently used children's books as well as monetary donations for four non-profits serving communities throughout Illinois:

1. Bernie's Book Bank: This non-profit serves kids in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties, and accepts new and gently used children's books ranging from birth to 6th grade. The books are then distributed to children in schools receiving federal funding to help low-income students eight times a year.

2. Look. It's My Book!: This non-profit distributes new books to children in Peoria and Tazewell counties six times a year. Its Founder & President, Janet Roth, shared that one principal stated that in her 33 years of teaching, she had never seen a program impact reading skills as much as Look. It's My Book!
3. United Way of Decatur & Mid Illinois- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library: This non-profit accepts monetary donations that are used to purchase new books for kids in Macon, DeWitt, Piatt, and Shelby counties once a month from birth until their 5th birthday.
4. Metro East Literary Project: This non-profit serves kids in the Metro East by accepting new, culturally relevant children's books, which are then distributed to kids and their families. MELP's motto is: "Literacy is Liberation! It takes you higher." The aim of MELP is to fight the literacy crisis and provide opportunities for kids (and their families) to have access to books in their homes. Founder and Director, Linda Mitchell, commented that kids need to see themselves represented in books.

Thanks to the generous donations of our WATL Committee members, and ISBA members as a whole, we collected 492 books and hundreds of dollars in monetary donations for these well-deserving non-profits. Your generosity and support are deeply appreciated! ■