



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MAYA SHUKAIRY

*"A woman is like a tea bag—you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water."*

—Eleanor Roosevelt

This quote perfectly describes how WiCCD came into existence three years ago. At that time, we were still living under pandemic restrictions and most of our court work, networking, and events were virtual. The pandemic drastically changed the way we practise law and, sadly, contributed to reducing our social connections. It was a particularly stressful and difficult time for all criminal defence lawyers, but even more so for female criminal defence lawyers. We were disappointed with the poor treatment that some of us received from some male colleagues, so we decided that we needed to have a safe space for us women in criminal defence.

At that time, there was no association in criminal defence that was exclusively ruled by women. There was no safe space for us to go to share our frustration and challenges. Then came the idea to start our own entirely female-run criminal defence association. WiCCD was born. All we wanted was to have a safe space where we could bond and connect, away from the toxic and negative energy we were feeling in other spaces. We had no specific plans in mind for WiCCD, and we certainly did not anticipate that it would grow so fast, to the point that we would have more than 650 members, including paralegal members. To be asked to write for WiCCD's first newsletter issue is an extreme honour and privilege, something that I did not anticipate would happen. Three years after its creation, WiCCD still exists and is standing strong. WiCCD is actually stronger than ever now. It has become the go-to place for many female criminal defence lawyers across the country for education, mentorship, connections, or just venting.

This incredible growth wouldn't have been possible without the hard work and dedication of each and every person on our past and current Executive and Administration teams. We have all worked together in a loving and supportive environment to deliver support, education, and assistance that is much needed by women in this very demanding and tiring profession. WiCCD has also collaborated in original programming, including the Ontario Court of Appeal's Rosenberg Moot, which is a project of invaluable mentorship organized by Anita Szigeti, Dena Bonnet, and Anna Trbovich. WiCCD also has its own YouTube channel, which keeps growing. Our YouTube series have featured a wide variety of guests discussing various topics related to criminal law. Our YouTube channel won a Clawbie Award in 2023, which is something that none of us ever anticipated. The channel has more than 500 subscribers. WiCCD also has its own mentorship program, spearheaded by Amanda Ross, Hamna Anwar, and Breana Vandebeek, that pairs a junior member with a senior member of WiCCD.

WiCCD also regularly hosts CPD programs and has started to organize full-day in-person conferences.

In addition to our many programs and events, we are extremely proud of the collaborations, connections, and alliances we have built with many male members of the bar. Although WiCCD was created for us, women in criminal defence, to find a safe space and refuge, we still wanted to create a network of male friends and supporters. We have many male supporters and allies, including John Struthers, Marco Sciarra, and Nader Hasan, to name a few. We are also extremely grateful for the regular collaborations in education programs with the Honourable Justice Brock Jones from the Ontario Court of Justice in Toronto.

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## Emond Publishing

1 Eglinton Avenue East  
Suite 801  
Toronto ON  
M4P 3A1

orders@emond.ca

emond.ca

1-888-837-0815

## EMOND EXAM PREP

emondexamprep@emond.ca

emondexamprep.ca

WiCCD continues to expand and grow. It is now starting its very own newsletter, *The WiCCD Brew*. We will continue to work hard and deliver high-quality content to our members, and we strive to continue doing this at no or minimal cost to our membership. The sky is the limit for WiCCD, and we are all excited to see what the future holds.

I would like to end this by saying that it is a great honour and privilege that Anita Szigeti, the main founder of WiCCD, and my sisters on the Executive have trusted me to be the current President of WiCCD. To me and to many of us, Anita is a true inspiration. She works tirelessly and is so generous with her time and attention. She aggressively defends her clients, who are among the most vulnerable of people. Anita is a real and true lawyer.

Welcome to the very first issue of *The WiCCD Brew*! 🍷

## EDITORS' NOTE

### NEHA CHUGH & HAMNA ANWAR

As flowers are budding and we welcome this year's spring, we are overjoyed to bring this inaugural issue of *The WiCCD Brew* to you in hopes that it warms up your soul! At last we have a written platform for women and gender non-conforming individuals practising criminal defence law to share their wisdom on legal expertise, business acumen, practical advice, and inspiration, offered in real-life stories of our members who pursue justice on a daily basis.

When we reached out to our columnists, we were looking for women who could educate us using their authentic voices. Our writers are not afraid to share their vulnerabilities. In the *Second Shift* column, Enje Daniels' heartwarming article feels like a conversation with a dear friend. Enje openly shares her journey of starting her own practice after having two children and experiencing the "motherhood penalty" at work. She proudly gave birth to her third child as a sole practitioner last year. Enje reminds us of the resilience of women in our profession.

This theme of resilience naturally spills into all our columns. Women consistently show us that motherhood/caregiving and lawyering can be symbiotic. There are intersectionalities to our identities. There is power in proudly embracing who we are.

In the *Business Savvy* column, Anne-Marie McElroy reminds us of the value of having flexibility and autonomy at work. Many women leave the criminal defence bar around the time they are planning to have children. Theoretically, you can always hang up your own shingle, but is this really a practical option for most women? Anne-Marie encourages us to talk about money—now and always—with colleagues, mentors, clients, staff members, and family. She rightly points out that as women we often grow up not talking about money, but as adults we need to overcome this hesitation in order to become successful entrepreneurs. Anne-Marie reassures us that managing the financial side of a business is a skill, like any other, that can be developed over time. Let's face it: as women in this profession, we do tough things every single day. So don't let the discomfort of money talk compromise your true potential.

In the *Standard of Review* column, Maija Martin, our outgoing Litigation Committee Chair, gives us a handy summary of decisions from the Court of Appeal for Ontario and the Nunavut Court of Appeal. Maija gives us the bottom line from each case with key paragraphs, a useful tool for busy criminal lawyers. In future issues, we are excited to have similar reviews of case law from rotating courts of appeal across Canada, reflecting our national membership.

In between diaper changes and feeds, Monica Bharadwaj, a first-time mother of a three-month-old, miraculously contributes a guest column featuring three practical tips on how sole practitioners can plan for a maternity leave. Monica's grit is another example of the strength of women in our profession.

Kaitlin Smith, a busy mother and owner of various businesses including a cosmetics company, shares her secrets to success in an uplifting manner. Kaitlin asks us the same question that Beyoncé does: Who run the world? Kaitlin's column also informs us about

the work licensed paralegals can contribute towards our criminal practices; this collaboration of paralegals and lawyers is in the spirit of WiCCD.

Want to learn more about what WiCCD has been up to? Anita Szigeti's *Event Redux* shares all the perks our members can take advantage of at no cost. Above all, WiCCD strives to create a supportive community. Many of you are a part of that community through our listserv, which offers generous advice and precedents.

Ultimately, we are all in different seasons of our lives, but whether you are starting out in criminal law, have been practising for some time, or are planning to start your own business, whether you are child-free, on a fertility journey, or a seasoned mother—we *all belong in criminal law*. Let's continue to support each other. Remember, at WiCCD there is always someone to lean on. We hope you enjoy *The WiCCD Brew!* ☕



Enje Daniels is a sole practitioner in Hamilton, Ontario and is currently on maternity leave with her third child.

## THE SECOND SHIFT

### ENJE DANIELS

It was 5:05 a.m. when my third baby entered the world. I felt at peace. I was prepared for this. This time, it would be different.

When I started my career in criminal defence in March 2021, I was fortunate enough to have worked for a firm that offered me a part-time position. I had a 13-month-old little girl, and I was ready to start something new. I needed the flexibility and time to be with her, because she was only in daycare two days a week. The limited time I had meant I needed to be efficient and get my work done fast. But I was balancing too many things, and in the end I was taking home a paycheque that barely reflected the hard work I was doing. I remained in that position until I was pregnant with my second child. I gave birth to him in May 2022. I hated the idea of having to tell my boss I was pregnant. I hated feeling the pressure to go back to work when I was not ready. Unfortunately, I did. I went back to work six months later, in November 2022. It was hard. Again, my attention was divided. I now had a two-and-a-half-year-old and a six-month-old in part-time care while I made a part-time paycheque that just was not cutting it.

*I hated the idea of having to tell my boss I was pregnant. I hated feeling the pressure to go back to work when I was not ready. Unfortunately, I did.*

My career was in constant fluctuation. While no one ever said it to me, I knew I was viewed as a liability, not an asset. I reached my limit when on one occasion I felt I was being overlooked for a promotional opportunity—that dreaded motherhood penalty. I was done having to apologize for the crucial role I play in society as a mother. And I was tired of having my legal expertise and skill ignored because I was not 100 percent present all the time. I loved my work, but I also love being a mother. It was at that point, in August 2023, that I decided I needed a change. I gave my two-week notice, set up shop, and started out on my own in September 2023.

I gave birth to my third baby in November 2024. In the last year and a half, working for myself, I made three times what I made working for someone else. I still work the same amount, and I still take two to three days off—or sometimes an entire week off—to be with my young children. I balance my workload by taking only 20 to 25 clients at a time; 80 percent are for Legal Aid Ontario and 20 percent are private files. I created a client guide so that clients know what to expect and I don't have to be on call at all hours of the day. I connected with the duty counsel in my area and started taking on duty counsel shifts to help balance my income in slower months. I also had to make the decision to take on only a handful of in-custody clients, so as to avoid the need to be "on" all the time.

*Solo practice was the answer to creating a successful and profitable career that worked for my family and around the family life I wanted.*

Solo practice was the answer to creating a successful and profitable career that worked for my family and around the family life I wanted. This was not an easy decision to make, but every time I don't have to miss my daughter's jiu-jitsu class or my son's swimming lesson, I know it was the best decision for me.

Of course, the caveat is that you cannot stop working completely during your maternity leave when you are in solo practice, but I ran the numbers and saved up along the way. I figured out the amount of money I needed to cover my overhead costs, reduced my case load to about three or four files, and filled any gaps with my beloved duty counsel shifts. This works out to be approximately three to four days of work per month—a perfect balance while still getting lots of baby snuggles.

The decisions I have made would have not been possible without my husband, who cheered me on every step of the way. He even bought me a custom-made “Enje Daniels Criminal Law” sweater this past Christmas. It’s a perfect fit with a little bit of spit-up on it too.

As women, lawyers, and mothers, we all have unique stories of how we’ve stayed in practice, taken short or long leaves, and kept on pursuing justice. Every story and perspective is a step towards understanding what makes us women so resilient. 🍵



**Anne-Marie McElroy** is an Ottawa-based lawyer and the founder of McElroy Law. She is an award-winning blog writer who makes frequent appearances on local media about criminal law.

*When I first went out on my own, I had a two-year-old and a five-month-old. I didn’t have any background in business, but working according to my schedule meant a huge relief from the never-ending scramble to get to daycare and court.*

*Managing the financial side of a business is a skill like any other, one that can be developed and honed.*

## BUSINESS SAVVY

### ANNE-MARIE MCELROY

I am delighted to be contributing to *The WiCCD Brew*, and specifically the *Business Savvy* column. I have been in private practice since my call to the bar in 2010 and have run my own firm since 2015. When I first went out on my own, I had a two-year-old and a five-month-old. I didn’t have any background in business, but working according to my schedule meant a huge relief from the never-ending scramble to get to daycare and court. Since then, I have leaned into and stepped back from practice at various points, managing parenting through the pandemic and caregiving for family members through medical crises. I am forever grateful that my practice gave me the flexibility and autonomy to make the decisions that would best serve me and my family.

I am also grateful for organizations like WiCCD that champion women in private practice and the incredible work that we do. Along with providing support and mentorship for substantive files, it’s so important that we support each other as we develop our skills in business as well. And part of that is talking about money.

Over the years, I have watched innumerable colleagues leave private practice for jobs at the Crown’s office, as duty counsel, in government, or even outside of law altogether. I’ve heard over and over from young lawyers that the business side of private practice is too much for them, and they don’t want to have to worry about billing or managing their practice’s finances. I get it: we didn’t go into criminal defence work because we were fascinated by spreadsheets or accounting. There are no classes in law school about billing or trust accounting. And many of us, like me, didn’t grow up in a household where money was discussed transparently, and it can feel awkward or even crass to talk about it. Despite these obstacles, it’s important not to shy away from talking about the financial aspect of practice.

While some women may be conditioned not to talk about money, discussing financial matters with our colleagues is an important way to support one another. This means checking in with colleagues to see what the industry standard is for fees and making sure that we are charging enough and know our worth. It also means providing reminders and support to make sure we are giving enough attention to our billing and to meeting our targets. A cheerful “Did you make any money today?” from a friend can help me to prioritize that Legal Aid bill I’ve been avoiding, and the sense of accountability helps keep me on track.

For those of us who have been practising for a while, let’s support the younger women who are navigating the challenges of early practice. We can share our skills and experience, how we managed parental leaves and coming back to work. Let’s talk about how we negotiated raises and hit our billing targets, or how we secured loans to smooth out our cash flow when we went out on our own. We can discuss the benefits of a draw versus a salary and give some tips on how to survive the crunch of tax season. We can share the names of good bookkeepers and accountants that we can outsource work to, making our lives easier and saving us time and money.

And for those early on in your careers: ask the questions and seek advice. Managing the financial side of a business is a skill like any other, one that can be developed and honed. It can be intimidating, but you can draw on the resources available to you to build confidence, grow your practice, and reap the benefits of defence work.

Money is an important part of doing business. It doesn’t make our work less honourable or important if we make a decent living. Focusing on the fiscal side of practice, whether as associates, sole practitioners, or principal lawyers, means giving ourselves the gift of



a career that is financially sustainable, and hopefully keeping young women in private practice for years to come. So let's talk about money and support one another. And let's recognize that it is possible to have the financial security of the public sector in private practice. It takes a bit more planning and a little more savvy (get it?), but we can do it. 🍵



**Maija Martin** is the founder of Martin Barristers. She appears regularly before the Court of Appeal for Ontario and the Nunavut Court of Appeal. Maija has appeared before the Supreme Court of Canada for both individuals and interveners.

## THE STANDARD OF REVIEW

### MAIJA MARTIN

Welcome to the debut column of The Standard of Review. In each issue we will invite a different WiCCD member from across the country to give us their take on recent appellate decisions from their region, with an emphasis on the bottom-line, practical takeaway for busy criminal lawyers. Please get in touch with the editors if you want to contribute.

This issue features decisions from the Court of Appeal for Ontario and the Nunavut Court of Appeal summarized by Maija Martin, our outgoing Litigation Director, who practises in both regions.

#### **R V ORDONIO, 2025 ONCA 135**

After 13 hours of being subjected to every trick in the Reid technique playbook, Mr Ordonio admitted to stabbing Ms Hsin. On appeal, Justice Brown found that the trial judge erred in assessing the cumulative effect of the lengthy aggressive questioning of the appellant and misapprehended evidence about whether he fell asleep during the interview. The statement was not excluded but sent back to be reassessed by the trial judge hearing the new trial.

The Court rejected the submission that use of the Reid technique in questioning an accused created a rebuttable presumption that statements obtained in this manner should be considered inadmissible, given that the Crown is already required to prove voluntariness beyond a reasonable doubt.

**The takeaway:** While police are entitled to continue questioning an accused who has indicated they don't wish to make a statement, repeated, aggressive questioning over a lengthy period can create an atmosphere of oppression that renders the statement involuntary. **Key paragraphs:** 96 and 101-103.

#### **R V MUCPA, 2024 NUCA 15**

The Nunavut Court of Appeal typically sits three times a year and is composed of judges from the Court of Appeal of Alberta and *ex officio* justices of the Nunavut Court of Justice and the Yukon and Northwest Territories territorial courts. The Court grapples with significant issues such as the intersection of *Gladue* principles and crimes of violence, often involving sexual violence.

Mr Mucpa was convicted of the second-degree murder of his aunt and sentenced to a period of parole ineligibility of 20 years. While the Court found that the trial judge erred in admitting the appellant's criminal record on a s 10(b) or voluntariness *voir dire*, they found that the error was harmless and the evidence was admissible under s 24(2), and they dismissed the conviction appeal.

On the sentence appeal, the Court found the parole ineligibility period of 20 years imposed after trial to be demonstrably unfit and reduced it to 13 years. The trial judge had cited the "epidemic in Nunavut of gendered and non-gendered violence against Inuit"<sup>1</sup> as requiring a sentence five years longer than that requested by the Crown. The Court found that the trial judge erred in characterizing the killing as a near first-degree murder and in treating the

1 At para 86.

appellant's mental illness as an aggravating factor on sentence. The Court was also careful to note that the appellant's serious mental health and cognitive limitations meant that the objectives of denunciation and deterrence did not militate as strongly in favour of extending the period of parole ineligibility as they otherwise would have, given the "senseless and unprovoked killing of an Inuit woman."<sup>2</sup>

**The takeaway:** *The principle of restraint applies to offenders convicted of serious crimes of violence, including Indigenous offenders with serious mental health issues. The assessment of whether the accused engaged in planning and deliberation must account for the existence of a mental disorder, which will typically be mitigating on sentence.*

**Key paragraphs:** 96, 113, and 121-122.

#### **R V SA, 2024 NUCA 14**

The complainant alleged that after a night of drinking, she awoke to the appellant sexually assaulting her. The trial judge rejected the appellant's evidence that the sex was consensual and convicted him. Justice Slatter found that the trial judge misapprehended material evidence about the appellant's testimony, specifically whether there were inconsistencies as to when he tried to leave the complainant's residence, whether he added details in cross-examination about drinking shots of alcohol, and when the appellant said he called the babysitter who was looking after his children at the time. Despite the deference shown to trial judges' credibility assessments, particularly in the context of sexual offences, Justice Slatter reiterated that these determinations must be based on a proper understanding of the substance of the evidence.

**The takeaway:** *While a trial judge's acceptance of the complainant's evidence can provide the basis for rejecting an accused's evidence, it does not provide a basis for overcoming misapprehensions of an accused's evidence. To win an appeal on the basis of a misapprehension of the evidence, you do not need to show that a conviction is impossible without this evidence.* **Key paragraphs:** 31 and 33. ☕



**Monica Bharadwaj** is a sole practitioner in Toronto, practising both criminal and family law. She is also a busy first-time mother of a three-month-old.

## **GUEST COLUMN**

# **MATERNITY LEAVE FOR SOLE PRACTITIONERS—WHAT TO KNOW!**

## **MONICA BHARADWAJ**

Pregnancy and maternity leave are often joyous events that bring with them the need to make both financial arrangements for yourself and arrangements for your practice while you are away. For sole practitioners, planning for maternity leave or parental leave can feel like one more daunting task to undertake, in addition to making endless arrangements for your clients and your practice during your absence.

Whether from a single-income or a double-income home, female defence lawyers who are sole practitioners may wish to keep the following in mind when planning for their maternity leave:

- 1. EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE:** The federal government will provide Employment Insurance (EI) benefits if you are pregnant or have recently given birth. There are two options for payment: the standard option provides up to 35 weeks of benefits at a benefit rate of 55 percent of your weekly insurable earnings, up to a maximum amount; the extended option provides for up to 61 weeks of benefits at a benefit rate of 33 percent of your weekly insurable earnings, up to a maximum amount. If you are sharing parental benefits with a spouse or partner, the combined benefit periods are 40 weeks and 69 weeks respectively. To qualify for and receive EI benefits as a self-employed criminal defence lawyer in solo practice, you must have entered into a Self-Employed Agreement or registered with the Canadian Employment Insurance Commission *at least 12 months* before filing your application for benefits. If you have not entered into this agreement and are not contributing toward this benefit when filing your personal or corporate income tax returns, you may find that the benefit is not available to you when you need it most.

<sup>2</sup> At para 121.

*Among the criteria is a requirement that the recipient complete, file, and swear out an affidavit in which they assert that they have a net practice income of less than \$50,000.00 for a period of 12 months immediately preceding the event.*

*The financial implications of maternity leave should not erode the joy of being at home with your child, where their wellbeing will be your primary concern.*

2. **BENEFITS THROUGH THE LAW SOCIETY OF ONTARIO:** The Law Society of Ontario offers a Parental Leave Assistance Program (PLAP) to help lawyers maintain their practice after the birth or adoption of a child. The Society maintains that the goal of the program is to reduce the hardship that arises when sole practitioners, among other groups of lawyers, take parental leave. Eligible applicants receive \$750.00 per week for up to 12 weeks, to a maximum of \$9,000.00 per leave. If more than one parent is eligible under PLAP, each parent may claim benefits, but the total combined amount of benefits cannot exceed \$9,000.00 per leave per family unit. The eligibility criteria are listed on the Society website. Among the criteria is a requirement that the recipient complete, file, and swear out an affidavit in which they assert that they have a net practice income of less than \$50,000.00 for a period of 12 months immediately preceding the event. Note also that if you are receiving EI benefits, you will not qualify for PLAP, which is limited to those who cannot access any other financial benefits under public or private plans.
3. **LAW PRO INSURANCE:** If you are thinking of dropping your practice status to part-time in order to reduce your monthly premiums with Law Pro Insurance while on maternity leave, be aware that Law Pro will only accept a request for a mid-term change to a part-time practice option if you are prepared to declare that you have in the last fiscal year practised no more than 20 hours per week on average for each week worked (and not more than 750 hours per year of professional time in private practice), and undertake to do the same during the next fiscal year; *and* that your billings in the last fiscal year have not exceeded \$100,000.00 per year and you undertake to maintain the same during the next fiscal year. It may also be that the premium amount for part-time status and exclusive practice in immigration and criminal law is the same, so check with the insurer. The part-time practice option will reduce monthly premiums for those sole practitioners who have other practice areas in addition to criminal defence.

If you are a criminal defence lawyer working as a sole practitioner, and you are pregnant and wanting to take maternity leave, it's important to be aware of the above factors when planning your leave. The financial hardship associated with parental leaves for female defence lawyers in solo practice or working in small firms is a critical issue that often affects decisions about how much leave to take. The financial implications of maternity leave should not erode the joy of being at home with your child, where their wellbeing will be your primary concern. ☕



**Kaitlin Smith** is a licensed paralegal working in a busy criminal law office in Kitchener, Ontario. Kaitlin is a mother of four and owns several businesses, including a cosmetics company.

*I felt as if I constantly had to choose between being a good employee and being a good mother. There's an expectation that women should work as if we don't have kids and raise kids as if we don't work.*

## PARALEGAL CONTRIBUTION

# JUGGLING JUSTICE: BALANCING LAW, BUSINESS, AND MOTHERHOOD

### KAITLIN SMITH

As a mother of two biological kids and two bonus kids, a paralegal in criminal defence, and an entrepreneur juggling multiple businesses, I've learned that success isn't just about working hard and cashing out—it's about being intentional, maintaining laser focus, and staying calm under pressure. Each day brings its own challenges, but I've built my career, grown businesses, and raised my children, all while making sure everyone's needs are met, including my own.

### STARTING FROM THE BOTTOM

I started out small, working as a law clerk at an all-female firm, making minimum wage with a baby at home. I took every opportunity to learn and absorb as much as I could. It didn't take me long to realize how hard it is to juggle work and motherhood, especially as I advanced in my career working as a paralegal. I went from law clerk to licensee (but still working in a law clerk capacity), to becoming an associate in a high-stakes defence firm where I'm not only responsible for ensuring efficiency and diligence in moving firm files along, but have also become responsible for my own client files. This brought a whole new set of challenges, since I alone am responsible for scheduling (and often appearing on) everything in my office, from consultations to pre-trials, from adjournments to applications, as well as for scheduling and facilitating preparation for trial proper. On top of carrying almost the entire mental load for my children, I also feel responsible for the mental load of my office and all our clients. I remember a point where I felt as if I constantly had to choose between being a good employee and being a good mother. There's an expectation that women should work as if we don't have kids and raise kids as if we don't work. But my career and businesses are such a big part of who I am that I often refer to them as "my other babies." At home, I need to ensure that my kids have everything they need, that they get to where they need to be on time, and that they are ready for whatever the day brings. At work, it's very much the same. I need to make sure that my boss can show up to court with a client who is prepared and a file that is tidy and organized, and that everything goes off without a hitch. This level of responsibility from all angles sometimes feels like both a blessing and a curse.

Criminal defence is tough. It's one of the most challenging areas of law, requiring grit, resilience, and constant flexibility. It's also a lot like raising kids—certainly none of us start out as experts, but over time, we gain the skills to make tough decisions under pressure and keep our "babies" thriving. Eventually we learn to trust ourselves, and we get really good at what we do.

One of the most important lessons I've learned along the way is how crucial it is to delegate. You don't have to do everything yourself. Whether it's outsourcing tasks or



relying on a colleague, building a strong support network is key to staying balanced. Raising kids? It takes a village. Running a law firm or business? Same thing.

### ENSURING MY FAMILY THRIVES

Setting boundaries between work and home is tough. When one of my kids is sick and I look at the calendar to assess how inconvenient it would be to stay home when we have 12 different court appearances in 3 jurisdictions—all at conflicting times—I'm forced to make some tough decisions under pressure. My principal lawyer, also known as my boss and now friend, has never given me a hard time about staying home with my kids when I need to. But he is a senior lawyer who has been practising for over four decades, and the nature of our working relationship is such that he depends on me; our clients depend on me. He has the utmost trust in me to ensure that things run smoothly, and the level of autonomy I have is both liberating and terrifying. It feels like a constant tug-of-war, because my children are obviously so dependent on me, too—and ultimately, they are my priority. But I also need my job to provide for them, and I want to set a good example of what it means to work hard and be independently successful. When I'm with my kids, I try to be as present as possible. We talk about my work, and they have even visited my office, which has led to some fascinating conversations about the legal world and the importance of helping others.

### SUCCESS AND SETBACKS: RINSE AND REPEAT

Setbacks happen, and the guilt that comes with trying to balance it all never fully goes away. I know I've taken on too much when I start making mistakes—whether it's mis-diarizing a court appearance or forgetting to pack my son's baseball gear. These moments serve as a wake-up call to reassess my priorities and refocus on what truly matters.

### WHO RUN THE WORLD?

To all the women out there grinding it out, here's my advice: when you stay true to your vision, everything will fall into place. You are allowed to have more than one vision, more than one goal. Success doesn't happen overnight, and it certainly doesn't mean you have to sacrifice being a good mother. In fact, I truly believe that being a successful woman in law or business complements motherhood. Being a woman is an honour and a superpower. ☕

*Success doesn't happen overnight, and it certainly doesn't mean you have to sacrifice being a good mother. In fact, I truly believe that being a successful woman in law or business complements motherhood. Being a woman is an honour and a superpower.*



Anita Szigeti is the founder of Anita Szigeti Advocates. She is a recognized expert on the law of mental disorder and is often counsel on high-profile inquests. Anita regularly appears before the Court of Appeal for Ontario and has appeared more than a dozen times at the Supreme Court of Canada.

## EVENT REDUX

### ANITA SZIGETI

Women in Canadian Criminal Defence (WiCCD) was founded in January 2022. In the last three years, the organization has grown to nearly 650 women and gender non-conforming legal professionals in criminal defence across Canada. Since our inception, WiCCD has been committed to offering barrier-free, high-quality programming and services to support our colleagues to stay in the fight. In this inaugural issue of *The WiCCD Brew*, we highlight just some of those perks of membership as we look to the future and gear up for more exciting events!

### MENTORING PROGRAMS

The first glaring need identified by WiCCD members was the need for mentoring. We first partnered with the Women's Legal Mentorship Program (WLMP) and jointly hosted a very successful Speed Mentoring Event. We also immediately rolled out our formal Mentoring Program, which pairs senior counsel with recent calls seven years and under at the bar. Mentoring terms run either four or six months each, and pairings take into account geographical location as well as areas of expertise and interest within criminal defence. WiCCD launched the fourth year of this program in 2025, having paired more than 100 new lawyers and law students with more than 40 mentors, creating relationships that will last throughout the participants' careers. WiCCD is also a partner organization in the [Court of Appeal for Ontario's Rosenberg Mentorship Moot](#), and many members participate as mentor/coaches, mooter/mentees, and organizers of this unique intensive mentoring event.

## AWARD-WINNING YOUTUBE CHANNEL SERIES HOSTED BY WICCD PRESIDENT MAYA SHUKAIRY

[WiCCD's YouTube channel](#) has more than 500 subscribers and offers 130 videos to enjoy! In 2023, we won the "Best YouTube Channel" Clawbie (Canadian Law Blogs Award) for spectacular content. Maya Shukairy hosts two series: *WiCCD Asks: Who Cares?*, which explores hot topics of the day in substantive criminal law or its practice, and *Find Your Niche (FYN)*, which features women practising criminal defence and highlights their accomplishments in particular specialty areas. There are also exclusive interviews with notable figures in the law, including Marie Henein, high-profile American defence lawyer Mark Geragos, and Ottawa's Lawrence Greenspon. Periodically, WiCCD's Executive also provides updates on our exciting programs and initiatives and our strategic planning for the organization. Our latest [update](#) tracks our progress at three years, and you can also learn more about our [history and mission](#).

## CPD PROGRAMS

### Online

WiCCD has hosted more than 20 distinct continuing professional development programs, all free, mostly online, with notable recent exceptions. Many legal education seminars were multi-part series, such as "Managing a Criminal Law File from Start to Finish" with Alison Craig, Connie D'Angelo, Sid Freeman, and Antonietta Raviele; "Cross-Examinations"; "Complex Bails"; "Sexual Assault Jury Trials" with Marco Sciarra; and "Impaired Driving" with Kyla Lee. Many of these series are available as a [CPD](#)

[playlist](#) on our YouTube channel. You'll also find other seminars on the channel, including a panel on representing Inuit clients and substantive updates on recent trial and appellate criminal law cases.

WiCCD has also held many online events that were deliberately not recorded, so as to offer candid discussions with high-profile role models in the profession, including judges, or address sensitive topics centred on allowing our members to share their experiences in a safe space. We gathered to discuss gender bias, sexual harassment, and sexual assault in our work spaces; how to handle being berated in Court or disrespected by colleagues or clients; and what to do if you're being stalked online by clients or others. On each anniversary of WiCCD's founding, we were privileged to celebrate with a woman judge in an intimate fireside chat. Justices Sheilah Martin, Louise Arbour, and Jill Presser all gave us wonderful evenings to remember.

### In Person

In September 2024, WiCCD held our first full-day in-person conference, co-chaired with Justice Brock Jones and dedicated entirely to bail. This event was free and open to all, offered a virtual attendance option, and drew nearly 400 registrants. It featured Crown attorneys and judges as panellists, together with defence counsel. The bail event was a resounding success. Building on the same

model, WiCCD co-hosted our in-person conference on mental disorder and the criminal law with LAMDA, the Law and Mental Disorder Association, on April 26, 2025 at Toronto Metropolitan University. Nearly 400 people registered for this event!

## JOIN US

WiCCD offers all CPD and other programs and services, as well as membership, free of charge as a matter of principle. We are thriving and growing, delivering high-quality events solely with volunteer contributions by our Executive and Admin staff. Join us as a new member if you're eligible, and subscribe to our [Link-tree](#) for easy access to upcoming free CPD programs and updates, as well as links to all our socials! ☕

