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TRAILBLAZERS

FAMILY | ELDER LAW

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What was the genesis of the idea/path that has made you a trailblazer?

I have both a law degree and a doctorate degree in social policy and philanthropy, which greatly informs my practice as an estate planning and elder law attorney. I also have children and other close family members with special needs, so I have first-hand insight and perspective into the estate planning challenges that families face. There is nothing more gratifying than helping aging parents handle the planning for their children or relatives with disabilities, from setting up special needs trusts, working with the designated trustees, and managing the trusts.

What sort of change has resulted from the concept?

I've spent the past 25 years helping families develop integrated estate plans that meet their individualized needs and goals. I'm passionate about these issues and have tirelessly advocated for the rights and needs of the elderly and people with special needs.

For example, I co-authored an amicus brief with the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) in a Massachusetts case involving a health care agent wife whose husband was injured at a nursing home and later died. After filing a wrongful death lawsuit, the nursing home argued the wife could not sue because she had agreed to submit all disputes to arbitration. The court agreed with NAELA that a health care agent's decision-making authority was limited to health care decisions and the family was not bound to arbitration.

I was also instrumental in developing a senior tax voucher program, through the Council on Aging, which has helped senior citizens "age in place" and stay in their homes.

What bearing will this have on the future?

The number of people aged 65 and older is large and growing. We need to help senior citizens maintain their current lifestyle and plan for their future with creative and out-of-the-box solutions.