

CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHTS

Advocacy for abuse survivors

In January, the law school's Wilbanks Child Endangerment and Sexual Exploitation Clinic hosted its second annual conference, which focused on interdisciplinary advocacy for survivors of child sexual abuse.

Clinic Director Emma Hetherington (J.D.'11) designed the gathering to bring attention to the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation and holistic, trauma-informed services for survivors of child sexual abuse. As such, discussions explored collaboration between lawyers and social workers as well as partnerships between journalists, law enforcement and other stakeholders.

"Advocates for survivors of child sexual abuse must work together to promote healing and seek justice," she said.

One of the event's biggest highlights was a panel examining the intersection between journalism and legal advocacy in the USA Gymnastics child sexual abuse lawsuits. The week prior to the conference, former Olympic and Michigan State University team doctor Larry Nassar was sentenced to 175 years in prison. The panel included an *Indianapolis Star* investigative reporter and three attorneys who worked with the reporter to uncover the abuse of the athletes by Nassar.

State of Maryland Delegate C.T. Wilson, who is known for his strong advocacy in the areas of child sexual abuse and statute of limitations reform, provided the keynote address. Notably, Wilson was featured in the Netflix documentary series "The Keepers" for his sponsorship of a state bill that raised the age by which survivors can sue from 25 to 38.

Other conference discussions centered around mandated reporting laws and how agency partners can work together to better identify cases



Wilbanks CEASE Clinic Staff Attorney Jean Goetz Mangan (J.D.'11).

Wilbanks CEASE Clinic makes history

In May, the Wilbanks Child Endangerment and Sexual Exploitation Clinic won the first case tried to verdict under Georgia's Hidden Predator Act. The legislation created a two-year window of relief from the statute of limitations for bringing civil charges in cases of child sexual abuse. The case was tried in the Paulding County Superior Court.

This case and its victory are very important milestones, according to Wilbanks CEASE Clinic Director Emma Hetherington (J.D.'11). "Many believed that cases brought to trial under the Hidden Predator Act would be 'too stale' and be 'too hard' to successfully prosecute," she said. "Also, with this being the first case to go to trial under the 2015 Act, it debunks the idea that the two-year window would produce a flood of cases. Most importantly though, this successful trial brought a sense of relief and justice to a now 45-year-old man who was abused from the ages of 9 to 18."

The case was tried by clinic Staff Attorney Jean Goetz Mangan (J.D.'11).



One of the conference's highlights was the "USA Gymnastics: A Legal and Media Collaboration to Expose Institutional Abuse" panel. Participants included: (l. to r.) Abused Children Heard Everywhere Foundation Attorney Courtney Kiehl, BakerHostetler Attorney Derek Bauer, Cornwell & Stevens Attorney Brian Cornwell and *Indianapolis Star* Investigative Reporter Marisa Kwiatkowski. These four worked together to uncover the sexual abuse of Olympic and MSU athletes by Larry Nassar. The panel was moderated by Penn Law Group Partner Darren Penn (J.D.'94).

of child sexual abuse as well as best practices in providing legal and therapeutic services for children who have experienced commercial and sexual exploitation.

Additionally, a trauma-informed termination of parental rights mock trial was part of the programming. The mock trial featured both law and social work students and "addressed the gap that exists in preparing future lawyers and social workers for interprofessional practice in the courtroom," according to Dr. Jennifer Elkins, associate professor at the UGA School of Social Work.

The Wilbanks CEASE Clinic – the first of its type in the nation – is funded through the generosity of law school 1986 alumnus Marlan B. Wilbanks. Its goal is to provide direct legal services in a supportive, professional environment as well as to educate and prepare the next generation of lawyers to represent survivors of child sexual abuse. The clinic functions as a resource center for survivors and attorneys who are seeking these claims.

Through the clinic's partnership with the School of Social Work, trauma-informed case management, referral and advocacy services are available.