

News



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Nelson Mullins Assists in Launching Guardian Ad Litem Project for Youth Human Trafficking Victims in South Carolina Family Courts

Pictured above are guardians ad litem during training at the Firm's Greenville office in preparation for the Youth Trafficking Project.

GREENVILLE, S.C.— Young victims of modern day slavery are being identified in South Carolina communities. These minor sex and labor trafficking victims can range from at risk youth to honor roll students. South Carolina Family Court Judge Michèle Patrão Forsythe, Nelson Mullins Pro Bono Administrator Norah Rogers, and Amanda Adler, Esq., are working together to launch a new initiative that will offer guardians ad litem (GAL) to minors appearing in court who may be in human trafficking situations.

Minors in abuse and neglect cases are provided a GAL in family court to ensure their best interests and voices are heard in their court proceedings. This is not historically true for minors appearing in family court with pending criminal charges. Trafficked minors are influenced to view law enforcement and the court as an ineffective system that is not on their side. They are scared to tell their story in open court, especially in cases where the family is the perpetrator. Appointing a GAL will provide an advocate to learn about the minor's background in an attempt to identify potential human trafficking situations.

Judge Forsythe and other family court judges are aware that minors with pending criminal charges who appear in their courtroom also may be labor and/or sex trafficking victims or potentially on the verge of becoming victims. The Youth Trafficking Guardian Ad Litem Project will focus on these minors identified by the court as possible victims of human trafficking. An appointed pro bono GAL will conduct an investigation and file a formal report with the court to state findings and advocate for services. The report will provide additional information for consideration by the judge when determining recommendations and rulings.

On March 29, 23 Greenville attorneys received youth trafficking GAL training and learned of the available local services. The Honorable Letitia H. Verdin provided the training introduction, followed by a presentation by state and federal law enforcement agencies. Alexis Scurry, from Richland County CASA, provided the guardian training. Kathryn Moorehead from the S.C. Attorney General's Office moderated a panel of victim and trauma informed services.

The Youth Human Trafficking Project will conduct an additional training session in Charleston on May 31.

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