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JOE MESSA REFLECTS ON 25 YEARS OF MESSA & ASSOCIATES

This year marks 25 years of Messa & Associates. I'm proud of the work we've done and the impact it's had on the lives of those who have been injured and harmed by negligence, bad medicine, and corporate wrongdoing. What started as two lawyers and three staff members has grown to 19 attorneys and more than 35 staff members. While much has changed over the years, our firm's grit, determination, and commitment to our clients have been constant. We've been truly fortunate to form the relationships we have with our referral counsel and clients who have greatly contributed to our success. I'd like to take this anniversary as an opportunity to reflect on the firm's history and values, as well as our future.

This firm started with a series of risks that paid off. First, with the decision to branch out on my own. Second, the financial realities of taking loans on my home for the capital and lines of credit necessary for operating. I made the choice not to limit my work to one practice area of personal injury, but to be there for whoever has been harmed. When I started, I never intended to have more than five or six lawyers, but as the calls for help and work came in, I made the choice to grow our team. We don't cherry-pick only cream-of-the-crop cases or rest on our laurels; we've grown as needed and worked hard.

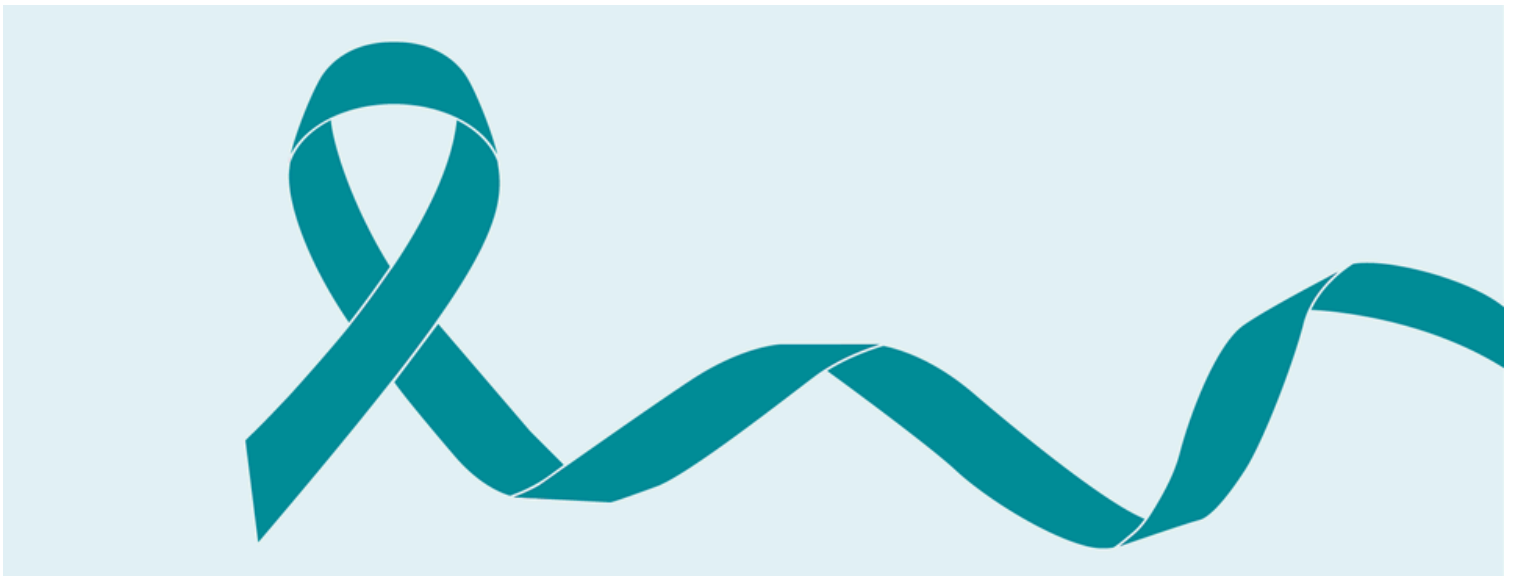
I'm grateful to all the members of my staff, but especially those who have been with me since the beginning: Elaine Hopkins, Roe Gomez, and Cathy Steffa. I'm grateful to all of the lawyers. Particularly those who have fought with me for 10-20 years. The personal relationships we've formed over the years with our coworkers have been very meaningful to me. We've grown close with each other's families and celebrated personal milestones together. We share a common goal, making the work that much more rewarding.

Over time, the goals and mission of the firm have changed. In the beginning, I was focused on running the firm with four other people and a couple hundred files, making sure we gave those clients the attention they deserved. It's evolved into a much bigger operation with a more outward focus, both politically for the betterment of the commonwealth and legally, ensuring the best possible results for our clients.

Over the last two decades, there have been major changes in the legal landscape regarding marketing and advertising. There was a time when advertising was looked down upon. It was viewed as ambulance chasing and not something a respected injury firm would do. I had to come to grips with the ways the industry changed and accept it or risk being left behind. Many successful firms from when I started aren't around anymore. Some of the biggest challenges came from the growing pains of scaling up. I had to realize I couldn't do everything myself. It's something I'm continuously working on.

When I look back on the last 25 years, there are a few things I'm most proud of. The people I've had the pleasure of working with, particularly the ones I've worked with for many years. The relationships I've developed with our clients, many of which have continued through the years. And most importantly, making a difference in the lives of injured people. Not only by restoring quality of life for those who have been harmed, but by helping bring about positive change in the law, and by helping make citizens safer by holding wrongdoers accountable, resulting in changes in products and policies. Also, developing professional relationships not only outside this firm, but outside the legal industry has accelerated the growth of this firm. We've created standards in these relationships, so they know we are reliable, trustworthy, and will always do right by them and their clients.

When I think about the next 25 years and the future of this firm, I want to leave a legacy beyond myself for the next generation. I worked hard to build this over the years and believe in its future.



Sexual Assault Awareness Month & Child Abuse Prevention Month

By: Laura E. Laughlin, Esq.

April marks two critically important observances: Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) and Child Abuse Prevention Month.

As a victim's rights attorney, I have seen firsthand how sexual violence and child abuse reverberate far beyond the initial harm. These cases are not defined solely by what happened in a single moment; they are shaped by what follows—how institutions respond, whether victims are believed, and whether justice systems provide pathways to healing or compound the trauma.

The Scope of the Crisis

Sexual assault and child abuse remain pervasive across all communities, cutting across socioeconomic, racial, and geographic lines. Despite increased public awareness in recent years, underreporting continues to be a defining feature of these crimes. Survivors—especially children—often remain silent due to fear, shame, manipulation, or distrust of authority figures.

In child abuse cases, the dynamics are even more complex. Perpetrators frequently occupy positions of trust: family members, educators, coaches, and clergy. This betrayal not only deepens the trauma but also creates significant barriers to disclosure.

Statute of Limitations

Over the past decade, we have seen meaningful legislative progress aimed at addressing these barriers. Many jurisdictions have expanded the time period to file civil claims involving childhood sexual abuse. New Jersey and Pennsylvania have both changed their statutes of limitation, and I am hopeful that Pennsylvania will soon pass a look-back window to allow time-barred claims to be filed in the future.

The Importance of Civil Accountability

Criminal prosecution plays a vital role, but it is not the only avenue for justice. Civil litigation provides survivors with the opportunity to seek accountability from individuals and institutions that enabled or failed to prevent abuse. It also serves a broader public function: uncovering patterns, exposing systemic failures, and driving policy change.

Through civil cases, I have seen internal documents come to light, revealing long-standing knowledge of abuse and deliberate inaction. These cases can lead to institutional reform, improved safeguarding policies, and increased awareness—outcomes that extend far beyond any single plaintiff.

Prevention Must Be Proactive, Not Reactive

Child abuse prevention requires more than responding after harm occurs. It demands proactive measures: rigorous background checks, mandatory reporting enforcement, clear policies on boundaries and supervision, and ongoing training for those who work with children.

Equally important is education—both for adults and for children. Empowering children with age-appropriate knowledge about bodily autonomy and safe versus unsafe behavior can be a critical line of defense. At the same time, adults must be trained to recognize warning signs and respond appropriately. I am passionate about educating parents and others about abuse prevention and do so frequently on social media at @LLaughlinEsq.

Supporting Survivors Beyond the Courtroom

Legal representation is only one piece of a survivor's journey. Trauma-informed advocacy requires recognizing the emotional, psychological, and practical challenges survivors face. Access to counseling, medical care, and supportive services is essential.

As attorneys, we must approach these cases with sensitivity, patience, and respect for our clients' autonomy. Litigation should never come at the expense of a survivor's well-being. The goal is not only justice, but restoration of dignity and control with a focus on empowerment and healing.

A Collective Responsibility

Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month are reminders that this work cannot be siloed. It requires collaboration among legal professionals, policymakers, educators, healthcare providers, and communities at large.

Accountability is not merely a legal concept—it is a societal obligation. When institutions fail to act, when warning signs are ignored, when survivors are dismissed, the consequences are enormous.

This April, we all have an opportunity to do our part to make our communities safer from abuse and assault.



About the Author:

Laura concentrates her practice on catastrophic injury cases, including products liability, worksite injuries, and a special focus on medical malpractice and crime victim cases. Laura is an advocate for victims of sexual assault, abuse, and other legal issues in and out of the courtroom. She serves on the National Crime Victim Bar Association as the Vice-Chair of the Amicus Committee. She is licensed to practice law in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Florida.

Settlements and Verdicts

- \$4 Million for the Estate of a 37-year-old woman who died because her doctor failed to properly work up and diagnose the cause of her severe, persistent headaches, resulting in brain injury and death.
- \$2.5 Million Recovery for a girl who was injured in a train derailment.

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