

From Shifting Sands to Solid Granite: Afghan Judge Geeti Roeen and Her Family Have Safely Arrived and Need Support

By Tom Jarvis and Grace Yurish

In the spring of 2022, New Hampshire Supreme Court Justice (NHSC) Anna Barbara Hantz Marconi began to organize what is now the New Hampshire Coalition for Resettlement of Afghan Women Judges (the Coalition) – a volunteer group of highly motivated and philanthropic judges, lawyers, and teachers recognized by the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ). Their goal is to assist the International Institute of New England (IINE) with providing essential support to women judges and their families who were evacuated from the threat of the Taliban in Afghanistan through the efforts of the NAWJ, the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), and the US Department of State.

Thanks to the endeavors of the Coalition, one such judge, the Honorable Geeti Roeen (along with her husband, Dr. Ziaurahman Roeen, and their three children) was safely relocated to New Hampshire in December 2023.

“Getting the family here was mostly due to the efforts of the NAWJ and the IAWJ but our support group played a big part in that it gave the ongoing efforts a



The Roeen family sitting on the couch in their new home in Manchester, New Hampshire. From left to right: Mehrsa Roeen, Dr. Ziaurahman Roeen, Kyanoush Roeen, Judge Geeti Roeen, and Kiyomars Roeen. Photo by Tom Jarvis

goal,” Justice Hantz Marconi says. “Just the fact that we were here gave the working groups support and a push to kind of get it done. It was a lot of hurry up and wait for us but now, with the family arriv-

ing, it’s like the starting gun. We have concrete goals and can put together a needs list. It’s a more manageable, tangible project.”

The seeds of the Coalition began

when NHSC Justice James Bassett attended a virtual panel discussion about the Afghan women judges, presented by Duke University School of Law. After hearing from him about the efforts of the IAWJ, Justice Hantz Marconi got in touch with IAWJ member and retired Vermont judge Patricia Whalen.

“I spoke to Patti about a judge who had previously arrived in Vermont, named Anisa Rasooli, who was the Ruth Bader Ginsberg of Afghanistan,” Justice Hantz Marconi says, adding that Rasooli was the first woman to sit on the Supreme Court of Afghanistan. “She had resettled in Vermont and there was a second judge slated for Vermont – Judge Geeti Roeen – and we wanted to try to host her in New Hampshire. Jackie Waters from the Judicial Branch and I worked with retired Judge Brenda Murray from the NAWJ to get the ball rolling and then Judge Ellen Christo got involved. We also have great support from lawyers and the law school. For fundraising, the Coalition partnered with the New Hampshire Women’s Bar Association and the New Hampshire Bar Foundation.”

ROEEN *continued on page 26*

NHBA Prison Series: Parole and Prison Reform

By Scott Merrill

A person in New Hampshire who violates the conditions of their parole is very often referred to by the New Hampshire Department of Corrections (DOC) as a “Community Failure.” For those seeking prison reform, terms like this can say more about a system that sets people up for failure by not addressing their needs – including substance misuse and mental health treatment – than the individual.

Joseph Lascaze, campaign manager for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Hampshire’s Smart Justice Campaign, says the term “community failure” doesn’t do justice to the difficult challenges parolees often confront on the outside – like finding transportation to court hearings or a mental health provider – or the rehabilitative paths they chose to receive parole in the first place.

“Failure is stopping and not continuing,” he says. “Everyone has had setbacks, but failure is giving up. Parole is about progress, not perfection.”

Lascaze, who was released from the New Hampshire State Prison (NHSP) in July 2019 after serving more than 13 years for armed robbery, began cataloging different barriers and challenges people seeking parole were facing while he was still incarcerated.

“People need resources to succeed,” he says. “Imagine a doctor who says their patients suffering from mental illnesses are community failures because they had one episode. That’s the lens the parole department is using for people who they say, ‘can’t adapt to the community.’ Based on the current tools and resources that are available, yes, they’re failing.”

PRISON SERIES *continued on page 28*

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

Robin Melone: A Heavy Lifter In and Out of the Courtroom

By Kathie Ragsdale

She has represented some of the most notorious defendants in the state, has taken on the governor and attorney general for their comments about a jury decision, and has won some of the most prestigious awards that her Bar colleagues offer.

But Robin D. Melone is a heavy-weight in more ways than one.

The woman can also deadlift 250 pounds.

“I’m a challenge taker,” says Melone, who joined the Concord firm of Pastori Krans on January 1.

The former public defender and long-time criminal defense lawyer grew up “all over the place,” including 15 years in West Virginia, before enrolling at Wesleyan College as a music major. But she



felt out of place at the rural, Christian school and transferred to Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, a move she calls “the best thing I ever did.”

“The exposure to people, ideas, and open conversations really shaped my willingness and ability to ask vulnerable questions, which I think makes me a good attorney,” she adds.

Two professors at Mount Holyoke had strong influences on her, includ-

MELONE *continued on page 20*

IN EVERY ISSUE

NHBA News 1-22, 26-29
Opinions 4-5
NHBA•CLE 23-25

Practice Area Section 30-38
NH Court News 39-42
Classifieds 43-47

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INSIDE

President’s Perspective. Midyear Meeting 2024: A Premier Opportunity. **PAGE 2**

George Moore: Looking Back on a Born Leader. **PAGE 3**

Melissa Countway Confirmed. **PAGE 6**

2024 Midyear Meeting Agenda. **PAGE 7**

We the People. Hollis-Brookline Named State Champions. **PAGE 8**

Bar Foundation. Julie Smiley Named Associate Executive Director. **PAGE 10**

Midyear Meeting Supplement Inside



Wellness Corner. Want to Be Stress-Free? Think Again. **PAGE 11**

Thank You to Our Contributors. **PAGE 17**

Crossword Puzzle Answers. **PAGE 17**

Information Technology. Businesses Need to Become Privacy Law Compliant. **PAGE 18**

Criminal Law and Health Law
Practice area articles with important information and updates. **PAGES 30-38**

ing one who was an attorney and “really helped me understand what I could do as an attorney,” she says.

She went on to Suffolk University Law School and, upon graduation, straight to the public defender’s office in Manchester, where she spent 10 years.

“My time as a public defender was hands-down the highlight of my career – challenging and infuriating but also rewarding,” Melone says. “Social justice work is really mission-driven, and it still really defines the work that I do.”

After leaving the office, she did a brief stint at a small law firm before opening Melone Law in Nashua as a solo practice from 2015 to 2018, doing largely criminal work. She joined Wadleigh, Starr & Peters in Manchester in 2018, again focusing on criminal law, representing both defendants and victims.

Many of her clients have been the stuff of headlines, including Owen Labrie, the St. Paul’s School student who sought a new trial after being convicted on misdemeanor sexual assault and other charges, as well as Theodore Luckey, who pleaded guilty to killing two men at a Bedford hotel in 2021.

Oftentimes, representing a defendant in high-profile criminal cases makes you “the second most hated person in the courtroom,” Melone acknowledges. “As defense attorneys, we become the surrogates for the public’s vitriol about our clients... I can’t take it personally.”

But the cases she remembers best are not of the banner headline variety – like the young woman who stole from a grocery store because she had run out of food

stamps, or the elderly woman accused of a misdeed that was likely dementia-related. Getting good results in such cases has been the most rewarding, Melone says.

“It’s never been just a job for me,” she says. “I really value the lives I’m able to impact.”

She has also represented clients on both sides in Title IX proceedings at colleges and schools and is trained in trauma-informed investigation techniques for handling in-house investigations of sexual assault or harassment at businesses and educational institutions. She is also a DOVE attorney.

Criminal defense lawyer Tony Sculimbrenne, of Gill and Sculimbrenne in Nashua, has known Melone since law school and turns to her “for a different and thoughtful perspective on an issue,” he says. “I value her opinion and counsel deeply.”

Likewise, former Wadleigh, Starr & Peters colleague Jeffrey D. Odland, who has known Melone for 15 years, says she has a gift with clients and is “compassionate and authoritative simultaneously.”

“Robin takes on high-profile, high-stress cases and handles them all with the utmost professionalism,” he says. “In the meantime, she has been a force behind several bar organizations and has supported and mentored countless attorneys.”

Shaylen Roberts, assistant county attorney in the Merrimack County Attorney’s Office, says she finds herself feeling “simultaneously anxious and relieved” when she learns Melone will be opposing counsel in a case.

“I am anxious because of her skill level, attention to detail, work ethic, and vast litigation experience – but I am relieved because she is an outstanding col-



Robin Melone confers with client Theodore Luckey during a hearing. Photo by Jeff Hastings

league: a straight shooter, an empath, a trustworthy adversary... and she has great shoes,” she adds. “Robin is an excellent role model for women in the Bar and makes a point to extend a hand to new, ambitious attorneys to offer support, guidance, and insight; and I am so grateful to be able to practice alongside her and learn from such a force.”

Melone is past president of the New Hampshire Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and was outspoken during her time in that office. When truck driver Volodymyr Zhukovskyy was acquitted in the 2019 deaths of seven motorcyclists in northern New Hampshire and Governor Chris Sununu and Attorney General John Formella said the “fallen seven” had not received justice, Melone publicly took them to task, saying their words showed “a lack of respect for what the jurors endured.”

She was given the 2020 Champion of Justice Award by the New Hampshire Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers for her criminal defense work and her “outstanding service to the organization or the community.”

The New Hampshire Women’s Bar Association honored her with its 2021 Marilla M. Ricker Achievement Award for her professional excellence and her work advancing opportunities for other women in the legal profession. The same year, she was named a Fellow of the American Bar Association for her leadership in the profession and service to society.

Melone also does work for the New Hampshire Lawyers Assistance Program, which helps members of the profession deal with addiction, depression, and personal or professional crisis.

“I just committed to being giving with my time to newer attorneys or older attorneys because I feel like what I do is hard,” she says, adding that she particularly identifies with women lawyers juggling work and motherhood, “figuring out how to be a parent in a job that is, at times, all-consuming.”

Saying “it’s time for me to take a break from criminal work,” Melone is now concentrating on her investigative practice and pursuing new opportunities in employment and family law at Pastori Krans.

She lives in the Boston area with her husband, two children, and dog, and when not working, likes to bake, garden, spend time outdoors, and lift weights at the gym. Her main lifts are over 200 pounds and her deadlift, 250.

“There’s something really gratifying about pushing yourself and coming out the other side,” Melone says. “I want to be an 85-year-old woman who’s able to get on the floor and put my shoes on, a goal that’s not work-related.”

She would like to enlist other Bar members in what she terms “a call to public service.”

“If you’re able to volunteer and do pro bono work, please do it,” she says. “It’s so rewarding and so valuable.” ♦



Robin Melone lifting weights at the gym. Courtesy Photo



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Notice of NH Law Office Being Victim of Scam

Please be advised that a New Hampshire law office (NH Law Firm) appears to have been the victim of a scam. The NH Law Firm served as the closing agent for the purchase and sale of property (Property) that was scheduled for foreclosure. To reduce any potential deficiency, the seller of the Property hired a real estate agent who, in turn, contracted with a short sale agent. The short sale agent worked directly with another law office, which represented the bank holding the mortgage (Mortgagee) and had scheduled the foreclosure.

Once a buyer was found, the short sale agent provided, via email, the NH Law Firm with payoff instructions, including wiring instructions. The NH Law Firm had regularly communicated with the short sale agent and the email

received appeared legitimate.

However, it now appears that someone hacked into the short sale agent’s email system and obtained the original email from the Mortgagee to the short sale agent. The hacker/third party then changed the wiring instructions and released the email to the NH Law Firm, which believed that it was wiring the payoff proceeds to the Mortgagee.

In reality, the payoff proceeds were wired to the hacker/third party. There does not appear to have been a breach of the NH Law Firm’s computer system. Based on all the foregoing, New Hampshire law firms serving as closing agents in similar transactions should be aware of this scam in order to take any and all precautions to avoid a similar scam. ♦