

### Dionne Scherff Leading Fight to Fund Criminal Defense Services for Indigent Federal Defendants



DIONNE SCHERFF

THE United States Constitution mandates that all criminal defendants receive effective representation. In federal cases, this often requires the appointment of Criminal Justice Act (CJA) Panel attorneys—private counsel who defend indigent clients when public defenders cannot. Due to inadequate funding for CJA defense services, however, fulfillment of this fundamental constitutional guarantee is in jeopardy.

Joseph, Hollander & Craft's Dionne Scherff, a 21-year veteran of the CJA Panel and the current CJA District Representative for the District of Kansas, will not stand for it. Although she has a full caseload outside of CJA Panel work, Scherff has continued to serve on the CJA Panel year after year because she believes everyone deserves high-quality legal representation.

Scherff explains, "When defense services are impaired, it is not just defendants who suffer. It compromises the integrity of the justice system as a whole. The interests of law enforcement must be balanced with due process for all accused individuals if we are to claim the legal system is fair and equitable."

In contrast to public defenders, who work on salary, CJA Panel attorneys are compensated at a statutorily-set hourly rate from a pool of funds Congress specifically allocates for their work. In 2025, that pool ran dry in July (three months before the end of the fiscal year). Many CJA Panel lawyers went months without being compensated for the work they had done and continued to do—with some who dedicate their practices to these appointments taking out loans or dipping into retirement savings in order to continue representing defendants in need. Adding insult to injury, Congress has yet to allocate sufficient funding for 2026.

Advocating for adequate resources in the coming years, Scherff has opened dialogues with senators and representatives as well as judges in the District of Kansas to ensure all stakeholders understand the importance of funding defense services. Armed with data, Scherff is pressing to make this appropriations issue a top priority on Capitol Hill.

"Fair trials and just sentencing outcomes require dedicated counsel for all parties," says Scherff. "It is time to ensure that every defendant has the representation our Constitution guarantees."

### ABA *Family Advocate* Features Article by JHC Attorneys Ardith Smith-Woertz and Carrie Parker

EXPERIENCED and newer family law attorneys alike rely on the American Bar Association's *Family Advocate* for practice management advice, practical tips, and the latest information regarding hot topics in domestic law. In 2025, some of that guidance came from Joseph, Hollander & Craft attorneys Ardith Smith-Woertz and Carrie Parker.

The Fall 2025 issue of the quarterly news-and-feature magazine included an article Smith-Woertz and Parker co-authored with University of Kansas Law Professor Michael Hoeflich. Titled "The Problem of the Tyrannical Client and the Benefits of the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct," the piece discusses ways in which the legal profession's formal rules of ethics provide refuge to attorneys faced with client demands that push the boundaries of their fiduciary duties.

The article published in the *Family Advocate* built on an essay first shared in the *Legal Ethics & Malpractice Reporter*, a monthly publication for which Hoeflich serves as Editor-in-Chief and Parker serves as Legal Editor. Exploring scenarios that arise in divorce cases, Smith-Woertz helped Hoeflich and Parker evaluate specific applications of the Model Rules for the benefit of her colleagues in the family law bar.

The Fall 2025 issue of the *Family Advocate* is available in hard copy through the ABA Service Center and online at [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/family\\_law/resources/family-advocate/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/family_law/resources/family-advocate/).



ARDITH SMITH-WOERTZ



CARRIE PARKER

### Familiar Faces Skipper Jacobs and Douglas Taylor Join Topeka Office



SKIPPER JACOBS

THERE are some fresh, yet familiar, faces in Joseph, Hollander & Craft's Topeka office these days. After years of going head to head with JHC attorneys, former government lawyers Skipper Jacobs and Douglas Taylor have joined their past opponents in private practice.

Before JHC, Jacobs spent nine years as a federal prosecutor—often working across the courtroom from criminal defense attorney Christopher Joseph. Knowing Jacobs as a quick thinker, sharp advocate, and reasonable negotiator, Joseph reports the firm scored big by adding Jacobs to the lineup. As Joseph put it, "I've seen firsthand what a great attorney Skip is. He approaches cases thoughtfully, and he always delivers in the courtroom. Everything he does, he does it well."

In private practice, Jacobs is focusing on family law. He represents clients in actions for divorce and paternity and assists with related issues like custody, support, and maintenance in ongoing cases and post-decree modifications. Of course, Jacobs is not letting his vast experience in criminal law go to waste. He is using it for the defense—assisting clients charged with crimes in Kansas state and federal courts.

Former Assistant Attorney General Douglas Taylor offices just down the hall from Jacobs at JHC's Topeka branch. Leveraging the knowledge gained from his eleven years of experience working in the Alcoholic Beverage Control Division of the Kansas Department of Revenue, Taylor now assists applicants for liquor licenses, advises license holders regarding business matters, and defends license holders in administrative actions (including appeals).



DOUGLAS TAYLOR

Diane Bellquist, who worked opposite Taylor on a number of matters over the years, remarked, "I'm so excited Doug agreed to come on board. Of course, his ABC experience makes him the go-to guy for liquor licensing, but his background in the regulatory and administrative field will be useful across a number of industries. The depth and breadth of professional and business services JHC can offer is now greater than ever."

## GENERATIONS OF ADVOCACY Criminal Defense is the Hoeme Family Business

FOUNDED in 2001 by brothers-in-law Stephen Joseph and Ross Hollander, Joseph, Hollander & Craft started as a family business. The family tradition continued with the addition of Christopher Joseph (son to Steve, nephew to Ross) a short time later. Although it is reaping the rewards of another family tree these days, the firm continues to benefit from a legacy of legal talent.

Blaire Hoeme, the daughter of Wichita criminal defense attorney Jess Hoeme, joined JHC's attorney roster following her admission to the Kansas bar. It was a full circle moment for the Creighton University School of Law graduate. "I grew up watching my dad fight for justice and help people," Blaire recalled. "I wanted to do that, too."

After exploring several practice areas, Blaire ultimately decided to focus on criminal defense. But clients and colleagues should not expect someone just like her father. "Blaire is definitely her own person," reports Jess. "I think that is why we have been so successful collaborating on cases. Our differences complement each other."

Doing things her own way is working well. Recently recognized by the Wichita Business Journal as a leader among young professionals in the legal field, Blaire is making a name for herself while continuing the Hoeme family tradition of delivering thoughtful counsel and enthusiastic advocacy.



Father-daughter attorneys Jess and Blaire Hoeme pose for a photo following Blaire's swearing-in ceremony.



# Wichita Office Adds Family Law Attorneys, Expands Reach

RESPONDING to persistent demand for assistance with domestic cases in south-central Kansas, Joseph, Hollander & Craft has expanded its Wichita family law division with the addition of two domestic lawyers.

An experienced litigator who loves working with people, family law attorney Jordan Massey joined JHC over the summer. Massey has a special ability to guide people through challenging legal issues while putting them at ease. Her colleagues describe her as a straight shooter who helps clients achieve their goals with equal parts pragmatism and grace.

JHC also welcomed Alexandro Vasquez to the Wichita domestic group. Although he is a new graduate, Vasquez devoted his law school years to gaining practical experience through the Washburn Family Law Clinic and interning under experienced family law practitioners.



JORDAN MASSEY



ALEXANDRO VASQUEZ

Vasquez, who is a native Spanish speaker, is particularly excited to help JHC serve more Spanish-speaking clients.

Practice group leader Julia Craft is thrilled with the new additions to her team, saying, “The firm has always been exacting about the quality of attorneys we take on, so I can’t pretend I’m surprised Jo and Alex are so great at what they do.”

Craft adds that the growing domestic practice group is poised to serve more people in more places throughout central and western Kansas. She notes, “Rylee Broyles has been a leader in expanding the geographic reach of the firm’s family law services, and she has emphasized that as an objective for our newer recruits. Now with seven family law attorneys in the Wichita office, we are practicing in more jurisdictions and helping more people than ever before.”

## Kylee Tokoi Steers Support for the Next Generation of Lawyers

THE Douglas County Bar Association Young Lawyers Section (DCBA YLS) will be coordinating a clothing drive to support the University of Kansas Career Center’s professional clothing closet.

In order to help law students seeking employment, the drive will focus on new and gently used attire appropriate for courtroom settings and interviews for positions in the legal industry. While the DCBA YLS hopes to get the closet particularly well stocked in the weeks preceding on-campus interviews at the School of Law, it anticipates offering multiple opportunities to contribute throughout the year.

According to Joseph, Hollander & Craft’s Kylee Tokoi, who was elected Vice President of the DCBA YLS for



KYLEE TOKOI

2025-2026, the clothing drive fits into the group’s bigger mission of increasing support for attorneys at the beginning stages of their careers. “For many young lawyers, the local bar association is the first source of support, mentorship, and connection to others in the profession,” explained Tokoi. “The Young Lawyers Section is acutely aware of this, and we want to be sure we are a useful resource as early as possible. So, in addition to encouraging membership among recent graduates, we aim to do more for and with law students.”

## Marisa No Honored for Service to Bar and Community

EACH year, the Missouri Bar presents five Pro Bono Awards to recognize lawyers who provide exemplary services to low-income individuals without compensation. Joseph, Hollander & Craft family law attorney Marisa No was among the 2025 honorees.

The award signifies the Bar’s appreciation for No’s work with the Volunteer Attorney Project (VAP)—a program through which attorneys in private practice provide no-cost legal representation to clients referred by Legal Aid of Western Missouri. No has participated in VAP since joining the Bar, setting a goal of consistently handling at least one VAP matter in addition to her standard caseload of dissolutions of marriage, paternity actions, guardianships, adoptions, and other family law matters.

No has always been dedicated to using her legal knowledge and skill for the public good. As a student at Washburn University School of Law, No spent her time outside of the classroom working as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for CASA of Johnson & Wyandotte Counties. Typically appointed to contentious divorce cases in which parties could not afford a Guardian Ad Litem, No championed the best interests of minor children caught in the middle of custody disputes.

Remarking on the potentially transformative effects of volunteering legal services, No said, “Being an advocate in someone’s corner can quite literally change the trajectory of their life.” She encourages attorneys to get involved early in their careers. “Even if you feel that the service you may provide is insubstantial, provide that service. You never know the impact you may have.”

To learn more about the Volunteer Attorney Project, visit <https://lawmo.org/volunteer/volunteer-attorney-project/>.

## Dionne Scherff Named to Forbes’ Inaugural Best-In-State Lawyers List

FOR decades, *Forbes* has been telling us who and what tops the charts on a variety of topics from wealth and business to higher education. Yet the business magazine known for its rankings never concerned itself with lawyers—until recently.

In June 2025, *Forbes* released its inaugural list of America’s Best-In-State Lawyers, a recognition the magazine says was “designed to spotlight the finest attorneys in private practice from across all 50 states.” Joseph, Hollander & Craft’s Dionne Scherff made the cut.

The list *Forbes* describes as a “collection of elite lawyers” features approximately 500 attorneys in total, with the number of listmakers in each jurisdiction determined by proportional representation. Of the five Kansas attorneys included, Scherff is the only criminal defense lawyer and the only female.

While the accolade came as a surprise to Scherff, her law partners thought it made perfect sense. Christopher Joseph remarked, “*Forbes* hit the nail on the head with this one. Dionne is a fantastic defense attorney. There is no one else I’d rather try a case with.”

To review the full list, go to <https://www.forbes.com/lists/best-in-state-lawyers/>.



DIONNE SCHERFF

RECOGNIZED BY  
**Best Lawyers®**



<b>Ardith Smith-Woertz</b>	Family Law Family Law Mediation
<b>Casey Meek</b>	Criminal Defense: General Practice
<b>Christopher Joseph</b>	Criminal Defense: General Practice Criminal Defense: White-Collar
<b>Diane Bellquist</b>	Ethics & Professional Responsibility Law Health Care Law Medical Malpractice Law: Defendants Professional Malpractice Law: Defendants
<b>Dionne Scherff</b>	Criminal Defense: General Practice Criminal Defense: White-Collar
<b>Jess Hoeme</b>	Criminal Defense: General Practice DUI / DWI Defense
<b>Julia Craft</b>	Family Law
<b>Lindsey Erickson</b>	Criminal Defense: General Practice
<b>Rachel Whitsitt</b>	Family Law Family Law Mediation

### ONES TO WATCH®

<b>Ashley Franden</b>	Family Law
<b>Hannah Wittman</b>	Family Law
<b>Kylee Tokoi</b>	Family Law
<b>Mackenzie Orchard</b>	Family Law
<b>Marisa No</b>	Family Law
<b>Rylee Broyles</b>	Family Law



<b>Ardith Smith-Woertz</b>	Family Law • Topeka, KS
<b>Caey Meek</b>	Criminal Defense • Overland Park, KS
<b>Christopher Joseph</b>	Criminal Defense • Topeka, KS
<b>Diane Bellquist</b>	Administrative Law • Overland Park, KS
<b>Dionne Scherff</b>	Criminal Defense • Overland Park, KS
<b>Jess Hoeme</b>	Criminal Defense • Wichita, KS
<b>Julia Craft</b>	Family Law • Wichita, KS

### RISING STARS®

<b>Ashley Franden</b>	Family Law • Overland Park, KS
<b>Carrie Parker</b>	Criminal Defense • Lawrence, KS
<b>Hannah Wittman</b>	Family Law • Lawrence, KS
<b>Jordan Massey</b>	Family Law • Wichita, KS
<b>Kylee Tokoi</b>	Family Law • Lawrence, KS
<b>Mackenzie Orchard</b>	Family Law • Wichita, KS
<b>Marisa No</b>	Family Law • Kansas City, MO
<b>Rachel Whitsitt</b>	Family Law • Overland Park, KS
<b>Rylee Broyles</b>	Family Law • Wichita, KS