

Pro Bono Attorney of the Month
Lisa J. Fitzgerald

*By Ellen Krakow
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The Suffolk Pro Bono Project is pleased to honor **Lisa J. Fitzgerald** as its Pro Bono Attorney of the Month. Fitzgerald has devoted many hours to the Project's bankruptcy clients, both as a volunteer at the Project's Bankruptcy Clinic and in her representation of clients in Chapter 7 proceedings. This is the first time Ms. Fitzgerald has received this honor, and we are extremely pleased to recognize her for the great work she has done over the past two years.

Fitzgerald's legal career began in Texas in 1992. This native New Yorker moved to El Paso Texas shortly after obtaining her J.D. degree from SUNY Buffalo. It was in El Paso that Fitzgerald first began providing legal assistance to indigent and disabled clients, as a staff attorney at El Paso Legal Assistance Society. Her cases there included landlord/tenant, divorce and bankruptcy representation. Fitzgerald's desire to work with the indigent/disabled community developed, in part, from her experience teaching daily living skills to mentally ill residents in group homes, prior to attending law school. She remained at El Paso Legal Assistance Society until 1995, when she and her husband, Martin Coleman, also a public interest attorney, moved back to Long Island with their, then, one-year-old daughter.

Between 1995 and 2012, in addition to expanding her family and parenting four children, Fitzgerald worked part-time on civil rights and personal injury cases at the law firm her husband established in Woodbury, The Law Offices of Martin J. Coleman. Her work there focused on Americans with Disabilities Act claims and negligence matters.

In 2012, desiring to return to Chapter 7 bankruptcy practice, and looking for a place to refresh her bankruptcy knowledge, Fitzgerald found Nassau Suffolk Law Services. She asked for the opportunity to shadow the bankruptcy attorneys at the Project's Bankruptcy Clinic under the tutelage of Rick Stern and the other very experienced bankruptcy attorneys participating in the bimonthly Clinic. It was not long after she started shadowing attorneys that Fitzgerald was ready to interview and consult with clinic clients on her own. Shortly thereafter, Fitzgerald began accepting pro bono client referrals from the Project, and now has successfully completed several Chapter 7 cases. In addition, she still regularly attends the Bankruptcy Clinics to assist the Project in screening its clients. "Lisa Fitzgerald is a great example of an attorney who took the initiative to reach out to see how she could help, and as a result, she also gained valuable legal experience," comments Maria Dosso, Director of Communications and

Volunteer Services at Law Services. “We are lucky to have her enthusiastic participation in the Clinic.”

Fitzgerald finds the bankruptcy work she has done for the Project both interesting and rewarding. “Bankruptcy practice really suits my strengths as an attorney,” says Fitzgerald., “and it is so rewarding to help people out of their financial crises.” For Fitzgerald, one of her most rewarding Pro Bono Project matters involved a married couple. The husband had stage-four cancer . He had lost his business due to his illness, and the couple had accumulated substantial debt as a result. Thanks to Fitzgerald’s efforts, the couple’s debt was discharged in a joint petition. In addition, Fitzgerald helped the husband address his child support arrears that had accrued since his illness and could not be discharged in the Chapter 7 proceeding.

As the parent of four children (ages 20, 15, 14 and 7), Fitzgerald continually balances the demands of work and family. In addition to representing the Project’s bankruptcy clients, and assisting at the Project’s Bankruptcy Clinic, she volunteers at the New York City Bar Association’s bankruptcy clinic. At some point in the future, Fitzgerald hopes to return to full time private practice to focus exclusively on bankruptcy work.

The Pro Bono Project greatly appreciates all that Lisa Fitzgerald has done on behalf of its clients over the past two years. It is with great pleasure that we honor her as Pro Bono Attorney of the Month.

*The Suffolk Pro Bono Project is a joint effort of Nassau Suffolk Law Services, the Suffolk County Bar Association and the Suffolk County Pro Bono Foundation, who, for many years, have joined resources toward the goal of providing free legal assistance to Suffolk County residents who are dealing with economic hardship. Nassau Suffolk Law Services is a non profit civil legal services agency providing free legal assistance to Long Islanders, primarily in the areas of benefits advocacy, homelessness prevention (foreclosure and eviction defense), access to health care, and services to special populations such as domestic violence victims, disabled, and adult home resident. The provision of free services is prioritized based on financial need and funding is often inadequate in these areas. Furthermore, there is no funding for the general provision of **matrimonial or bankruptcy representation**, therefore the demand for pro bono assistance is the greatest in these areas. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Ellen Krakow, Esq. 631 232-2400 x 3323.*