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BOUL SUES THE STATE OF WASHINGTON FOR SYSTEMIC SEXUAL ABUSE IN JUVENILE DETENTION CENTERS ON BEHALF OF 188 VICTIMS

New Sexual Assault Abuse practice area established to seek justice for survivors of abuse

On September 5, 2024, Bergman Oslund Udo Little filed a lawsuit against the State of Washington and several of its agencies alleging the widespread and systemic sexual and physical abuse of 188 minors within state-operated juvenile detention facilities.

The lawsuit against the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Department of Social and Health

Services, Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration and other state agencies details a harrowing pattern of sexual abuse by guards, counselors, teachers, and medical professionals as well as instances in which staff allowed other inmates to sexually assault victims.

The abuses, which date back to the 1960s, occurred at Echo Glen Children's Center, Green Hill School,

Naselle Youth Camp, Maple Lane School, and several more. The plaintiffs, who were as young as eight at the time, were placed in these facilities as wards of the state.

The lawsuit alleges that these agencies failed to safeguard these children even though they were aware of the ongoing abuse. Instead, it contends that they fostered a culture of fear, violence, and cover-ups, prioritizing the protection of the state from liability over the safety and well-being of the children in their care.

“The scale and duration of the abuse detailed in this complaint are heartbreaking,” said Vanessa Firnhaber Oslund, BOUL attorney representing the plaintiffs. “The State of Washington had a legal and moral duty to protect these vulnerable children. Instead, these kids were subjected to depraved sexual abuse at the hands of those who were supposed to care for them and rehabilitate them.”

FIRM CREATES A NEW SEXUAL ABUSE PRACTICE AREA

The lawsuit against the State of Washington and several of its agencies is the first for BOUL’s new sexual abuse practice area and will be led by partner Vanessa Firnhaber Oslund and attorney Ruby Aliment. The sexual abuse practice area will focus on seeking justice on behalf of survivors of institutional childhood abuse.

Oslund is a supportive and fearless advocate of sexual abuse survivors who understands the devastating effects of sexual abuse. She has nearly two decades of experience seeking

justice on behalf of her clients against large corporations and institutions, and recently lobbied Washington lawmakers to allow juvenile sexual assault survivors to pursue civil claims regardless of how long ago the abuse occurred.

Aliment has been standing up to large corporations, government entities, and insurance companies since 2016. She has a proven track record advocating for and empowering sexual abuse survivors and has volunteered with the Seattle Clemency Project. Prior to becoming an attorney, she worked with sexual assault survivors on college campuses.

BOUL PARTNER VANESSA FIRNHABER OSLUND RECEIVES TOM CHAMBERS TRIAL LAWYER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Bergman Oslund Udo Little is proud to announce that firm partner Vanessa J. Firnhaber Oslund has been named the recipient of this year’s prestigious Tom Chambers Trial Lawyer of the Year Award. This honor is presented to an attorney who advances the art and skill of advocacy, either through their performance in trial or by mentoring others.

“This award is so huge to me because it recognizes and validates my approach to legal advocacy,” Oslund said. “I have never been able to, or frankly wanted to, live up to the trial lawyer stereotype of the macho lone wolf with a big ego. Instead, my successes have been forged through teamwork and bringing my full authentic self to the courtroom.”

The Trial Lawyer of the Year Award not only highlights exceptional trial performance but also a commitment to benefiting humankind. Vanessa embodies both criteria through her fierce advocacy in the courtroom and her dedication to guiding the next generation of trial lawyers. She has secured substantial outcomes for her clients, with her courtroom victories becoming the benchmark for the Trial Lawyer of the Year nominations.

“This award is so huge to me because it recognizes and validates my approach to legal advocacy,”

Vanessa’s path to becoming a trial lawyer was far from easy. When she joined BOUL in 2008, her potential



as a trial attorney was not immediately recognized. Even after securing a plaintiff’s verdict in 2011 as a second chair, it took several more years before she solidified her place at the lead counsel’s table. Despite facing doubts and being advised by some to stay back and handle briefing work, Vanessa forged ahead, carving out her own unique approach to trial advocacy. Her determination and refusal to conform to the conventional mold of a trial lawyer have been key to her success.

This award also acknowledges a lawyer’s ability to train and elevate others, a responsibility Vanessa embraces wholeheartedly. She actively encourages younger attorneys to take on significant responsibilities during trials. For example, last year, she stepped back into a second-chair role, supporting a less experienced colleague who was taking lead in her first trial. Vanessa’s support and guidance was instrumental in achieving a medical malpractice verdict of over \$13 million with her colleague, Ruby Aliment.

Vanessa’s leadership is defined by her collaborative spirit and trust in her team. She does not impose her

methods on others, recognizing that there is no single right way to try a case. Her approach challenges stereotypes within the courtroom and reflects the values of equality and justice she fights for on behalf of her clients.

Vanessa’s victories in the courtroom are matched by her passion for representing asbestos victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse. She has represented hundreds of mesothelioma victims and their families for more than a decade, achieving many multi-million-dollar settlements and verdicts. She currently

represents hundreds of clients who were sexually abused as children in state-run detention facilities and leads the firm’s new Sexual Abuse practice area.

Recognition as the Tom Chambers Trial Lawyer of the Year is a testament to Vanessa’s skill, resilience, and unwavering dedication to justice. Her achievements not only set a standard within the legal community but also serve as an inspiration for those who follow in her footsteps. Congratulations, Vanessa, on this well-deserved award!

COURT OF APPEALS UPHOLDS \$5.75 MILLION JUDGEMENT AGAINST VOLKSWAGEN IN THE MESOTHELIOMA DEATH OF SPOKANE MAN

On September 16, 2024, the Washington Court of Appeals upheld a \$5.75 million judgement against Volkswagen AG of Germany and its American subsidiary Volkswagen Group of America for exposing Thomas Sorrentino to carcinogenic asbestos through his work as an auto mechanic at United Volkswagen in Spokane, Wash. Sorrentino died of mesothelioma in February 2021, just a few days after he gave his deposition for the case.

In its ruling, the Appeals Court denied Volkswagen’s motion to overturn the jury’s judgment as a matter of law (JMOL). The court also found substantial evidence suggesting that Sorrentino would have heeded a warning if one had been provided and that evidence showed that Volkswagen’s brakes were unsafe beyond what an ordinary consumer would expect, particularly given the severity of mesothelioma as a risk.

Finally, it was concluded that Sorrentino’s claims arose from VWAG’s contacts with Washington and that exercising jurisdiction aligned with traditional

notions of fair play and substantial justice. In doing so, the Court of Appeals acknowledged Volkswagen Germany’s extensive ties to Washington including advertising, the creation of an extensive dealership network, and creation of service bulletins.

“The Appeal Courts decision is an affirmation that courts are an equalizing force between corporations and humans,” said BOUL attorney Erica Bergmann. “Volkswagen threw immense resources trying to deny justice to Mr. Sorrentino and his family but that did not make them right or credible.

“I’m thrilled for our clients,” Bergmann added. “It can be nerve wracking to wait years for judgements to work their way through the appeals process. Nothing is certain which is why we handle our trials and appeals with attention and care.”

SPOTLIGHT ON KAREN BARGELT: A DEDICATED PARALEGAL AT BOUL

Karen Bargelt has been a paralegal since 2010, bringing a wealth of experience and compassion to her role at BOUL, where she’s been since 2012. After spending years working in the legal field in various capacities—including 17 years as a court reporter—Karen transitioned into paralegal work specializing in filing bankruptcy claims on behalf of the firm’s asbestos clients. Her journey into this role was driven by her interest in the engaging and detailed nature of filing bankruptcy claims.

Karen’s primary work involves filing claims with the trusts established by bankrupt defendants and communicating with BOUL’s clients about their claims. For her, the best part of being a paralegal is cobbling together the necessary pieces to file a successful claim and keeping clients informed during what is often a slow-moving bankruptcy claims process.

“Kindness and courtesy don’t cost anything,” she says, reflecting her belief that building strong relationships with the trusts is key to her work.

Her background as a court reporter, with a focus on workplace injuries and medical malpractice, has given Karen a broad knowledge base. She’s adapted her skills on the job, learning from her colleagues the intricacies of asbestos bankruptcy claims. Overcoming challenges in her role often requires creative thinking—especially when exposure evidence doesn’t fit neatly into the rigid requirements of the trusts.



“Kindness and courtesy don’t cost anything,”

Outside of work, Karen enjoys the outdoors, often spending her free time hiking, biking, skiing, and snowshoeing. She also has a passion for music, singing with her local choir and opera company. Although she jokes about “working on being an eccentric old broad with cats,” her dedication to her clients and colleagues is anything but eccentric. Her compassion and expertise make her an invaluable asset to BOUL and a trusted advocate for her clients.

MEET ULLA COOPER: A DEDICATED PARALEGAL WITH A PASSION FOR HELPING OTHERS



loved ones lost or injured by asbestos- exposure.

One of Ulla's most memorable professional accomplishments came when she prepared and filed a set of complex bankruptcy documents that became the model for other firms to follow. Her expertise in this case set a high standard for how similar filings were done, earning recognition for her and BOUL.

“I’ve developed deep connections with the families I help and have formed long lasting friendships with many of them.”

However, what she values most in her work is her relationship with clients. “Being kind and compassionate with clients and their family members is important,” Ulla shares. “While I may not meet with clients face-to-face, I’ve developed deep connections with the families I help and have formed long lasting friendships with many of them.”

Outside of work, Ulla shares her life with her husband, David, their four children, and a beloved schnoodle named Molly. She’s also an advocate for her son Carl, who has Down Syndrome, and has been a strong supporter of organizations aiding individuals with special needs and serving as the Board Chair for the Division of Developmental Disabilities for King County. Her advocacy extends to Vashon Island where she helped develop an organization that support employment opportunities for the special needs community.

In her spare time, Ulla enjoys reading, cooking, and spending time with family.

Ulla Cooper’s journey into the legal profession began more than 30 years ago when she decided to pursue a career as a paralegal. Attending Highline Community College in Des Moines, Wash., Ulla balanced motherhood and education, taking her youngest of two sons to daycare while completing coursework in Real Property Law, Civil Litigation, Probate Law, and more.

Over the years, she has gained experience across a wide range of legal areas including personal injury, intellectual property, and probate matters and enjoys the variety the job offers. She even spent eight years working with a financial planner where she honed her skills working with balance sheets, compliance, and SEC filings.

Over the last 22 years, Ulla has focused on her work in BOUL’s bankruptcy department, primarily dealing with asbestos claims. In this role, she meticulously investigates exposure sites, reviews medical and employment records, and files claims with 524(g) trusts to help families receive compensation for their

NEW ATTORNEY PROFILE: JONATHAN KIM, ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY



a self-described dog person, made it his mission to reunite Luna and Dan. After a quick investigation, he was able to find Luna and the pair were reunited. He was also able to find a witness who proved that Dan was innocent, and the case was promptly dismissed.

Jonathan recently joined Bergman Oslund Udo Little as an associate attorney and is working with families affected by mesothelioma and sexual assault. Jonathan is excited to “become an integral part of the great work being done at BOUL and fighting to win the compensation our clients deserve.”

In his personal time, Jonathan enjoys reading, playing chess, riding motorcycles and spending time with his six-year-old German Sheppard Rocket.

“fighting to win the compensation our clients deserve”

Jonathan’s desire to become an attorney grew out of a personal experience that led him to want to help others. As a child, he witnessed how hard a public defender fought for him in juvenile court which inspired him to pursue a legal career where he could fight for those who could not fight for themselves.

Jonathan began his career at a commercial litigation firm in Seattle before serving as a King County public defender for the past three years representing clients in Seattle-area courts.

His proudest moments as a public defender come from successfully defending wrongfully accused clients. In one case, a victim misidentified his client “Dan” who was then arrested for assault and harassment. Dan was recently homeless and had nothing but his dog Luna, who was left alone outside on the streets following his arrest. By the time Jonathan was assigned to the case, Dan had been in custody for several days without knowing where Luna was or if she was safe. Jonathan,

Jonathan holds a J.D. from Harvard Law School where he wrote for the Harvard Environmental Law Review, and was a member of the Environmental Law Society, Office of Sustainability and Asian Pacific American Law Student Association. He is currently a member of the Washington Defender Association and Washington Korean American Bar Association; and serves as a volunteer judge for the Northwest Regional Collegiate Ethics Bowl. He also holds a B.A. in Philosophy, Summa Cum Laude, from Whitworth University in Spokane, WA.

NEW ATTORNEY PROFILE: MEG PRICE, ATTORNEY



Meg's interest in the law emerged after she witnessed environmental disasters that highlighted the urgent need to hold corporations accountable for their actions. This experience opened her eyes to the critical role that legal professionals play in seeking justice. Observing the significant impact attorneys had in addressing environmental injustice and advocating for victims ignited her passion for a legal career.

She began her professional journey as a private practice attorney at a civil litigation firm specializing in insurance coverage and litigation of both first- and third-party disputes. This invaluable experience

inspired her to become an advocate for individuals harmed by the negligence of others. By choosing personal injury law as her focus, Meg committed herself to challenging insurance companies and large corporations on behalf of her clients. Today, she proudly advocates for the dignity and rights of mesothelioma victims, ensuring that their voices are heard.

Meg earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Oklahoma and graduated with honors from Lewis & Clark Law School. During her time in law school, she served as a teaching assistant in the legal writing department and worked with the Honorable Chief Judge Marco A. Hernández in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon.

Outside the office, Meg enjoys backcountry skiing, long distance running, and mountaineering.

“Fighting for victims and holding entities accountable isn’t just a job—it’s a mission. Compensation and justice go hand in hand, and we’re here to make both happen.”

NEW ATTORNEY PROFILE: MYLES CRANDALL, ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY



Prior to law school, Myles pursued a career in teaching and taught English in Hong Kong and La Réunion, a small island east of Madagascar. He tutored students in Los Angeles before joining the Teach for America program, where he taught 8th grade U.S. History in Denver. He then taught at the Salt Lake Center for Science Education where he helped the school maintain a 100% graduation rate.

Following 10 years as a teacher, Myles was inspired to pursue a career as an attorney to address injustices he saw in society. Becoming an attorney provides Myles with the opportunity to advocate on behalf of people who have been harmed or experienced trauma, and support clients to secure a remedy to help them heal and thrive.

“I choose to do this work because I want to help people, and this process in turn helps me”

Myles came to Bergman Oslund Udo Little after serving as Assistant Federal Public Defender in Miami, Florida where he represented people accused of federal crimes or seeking post-conviction relief. In one instance, Myles represented a client convicted of illegally possessing a firearm. Due to drug convictions that occurred when the client was just a teenager, the judge sentenced him to life in prison. However, over the past 20 years of incarceration, his client became a positive force: taking and teaching courses, working jobs, mentoring people, and connecting with family and friends. Working together with this client and the client's family, Myles was able to convince the judge to reduce the sentence, which means this client will be released in the next couple of years.

Myles is excited to be joining the experienced and caring team

of attorneys and staff at BOUL. He is most looking forward to learning about clients and their families. “I choose to do this work because I want to help people, and this process in turn helps me,” he said.

He earned his law degree with highest honors from the University of Miami School of Law where he was a member of the Miami Scholars Public Interest Program. While attending law school he also worked with the Innocence Clinic. He also holds a Master of Arts with Honors in Curriculum & Instruction from the University of Colorado Denver, and a Bachelor of Arts, Cum Laude, from Claremont McKenna College.

Myles resides in Seattle with his wife, a psychiatrist at the University of Washington, where they raise their daughter, with the help of their labrador, Molly.

In his free time, Myles enjoys exploring new places, including taking trips overseas, hiking in national parks, and strolling through Seattle neighborhoods with his family. He is also an avid tennis player.

Bergman Oslund Udo Little (BOUL) has stood for justice for ordinary people. Largely serving clients who live or have worked in Washington and Oregon, BOUL is active in courts throughout this region, recovering millions of dollars for its clients. Recently, BOUL has secured jury verdicts of \$13 million for a Kent, WA woman for medical malpractice involving cosmetic surgery; \$30 million for an Oregon man diagnosed with cancer caused by asbestos; \$11.2 million for a mesothelioma victim in Tacoma, Washington; \$10 million for “take home” shipyard asbestos exposure in Seattle, Washington.

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