

July/August 2021 Volume 33 Issue 5

## **RCBF** 7<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GOLF RAMSEY COUNTY BAR FOUNDATION *Tournament*

**Monday, August 2**  
**11:30 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.**

**Keller Golf Course**  
**2166 Maplewood Drive, St. Paul**

**Schedule:**

Registration and Lunch - 11:30 a.m.  
Shotgun Start - 1:00 p.m.  
Dinner - 5:00 p.m.

**Registration Fees:**

\$160 RCBA members  
\$185 non-members  
Foursome discount: \$135 per person  
(to receive this discount, please  
contact Sarah Mayer at  
[smayer@mnbars.org](mailto:smayer@mnbars.org))

Please consider sponsoring our event. More information and sponsor registration can be found on our website: [ramseybar.org](http://ramseybar.org)

Proceeds from this event go to the Ramsey County Bar Foundation, which provides grants to legal-related nonprofits working to provide access to justice in our community.

**Questions? Contact Sarah Mayer at**  
**[smayer@mnbars.org](mailto:smayer@mnbars.org) or 612-752-6625**

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## 2021-2022 RCBA Officers and Leaders

The following have been elected as the RCBA Officers and Leaders for this bar year:

**President** - Monica Dooner Lindgren

**President Elect** - Kenya Bodden

**Vice President** - Victoria Elsmore

**Secretary/Treasurer** - Andrew Rorvig

**Past President** - Susan Buckley

**Board of Directors** - Greg Egan, Samantha Ivey, Amy Krupinski, Hon. Jessica Palmer-Denig, Maya Missaghi, Charlie Shafer

**Voting Representatives to Minnesota State Bar Association -**

Landon Ascherman, Jessie Nicholson, Kelly Rogosheske

**Alternate Representatives to Minnesota State Bar Association Assembly -**

Mike Bradley, Sarah McEllistrem

## Be Part of the Barrister: Member Working Group Forming Now

The RCBA is working to form a publications committee to be a part of the Barrister newsletter. The group will provide members with an opportunity to help with editorial brainstorming, writing, working with contributors, and editorial work.

Interested in joining or know someone who is? Contact Barrister editor [Bethany Lenderink](mailto:blenderink@mnbars.org) at [blenderink@mnbars.org](mailto:blenderink@mnbars.org) or 612-278-6335.



# Meet 2021-22 RCBA President

## Monica Dooner Lindgren



### 1 When did you first become interested in practicing law?

After college, I was searching for a career path where I could make a difference in our BIPOC and immigrant communities. I did not know of many lawyers, let alone Latin@ lawyers and wanted to foster my passion in child advocacy while providing bilingual and bicultural support in our Latin@ communities. After college, I worked as a family law paralegal at Centro Legal, Inc.—a community law office that served our Latin@ communities. I was fortunate to work with a very special group of people who were deeply invested in providing excellent legal services through a diverse lens. This is where I first realized that a career in the law as a community lawyer best fit my interests and personality.

### 2 Can you share a bit about your career path and what you like most about your current practice area?

To this day, I consider my time at Centro Legal, Inc. as one of the best jobs I have had. Following law school, I worked with our BIPOC communities as a community organizer for various local political campaigns. After a couple of years, I landed my dream job in the Family Law Unit of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, Inc., also known as “SMRLS”. For almost 10 years, I primarily represented victims and survivors of domestic violence in their family law matters and assisted them, along with their children to flee from abuse. This work has had a huge impact on me both professionally and personally. I have realized the great importance and awesome task of providing high quality legal services to low-income persons who would most likely not otherwise receive such legal representation. It has only deepened my passion to develop access to justice and promote diversity within our profession. I currently practice Immigration Law where I am able to apply my experience in representing victims of violence and abuse in their immigration matters. Empowering our communities by providing families with the resources to live free from abuse is what motivates me to continue doing this work.

### 3 How did you first get involved with the RCBA and what made you want to pursue a leadership role?

I first started to get involved with the RCBA while working at SMRLS. By attending RCBA events, I learned very quickly what an impact the RCBA has had in allowing SMRLS to further its mission in providing access to justice. It's unwavering support has helped to serve so many low-income Ramsey County residents in their civil legal matters. It has been wonderful getting to know our association's leadership and members. The opportunities available to make a difference in our legal community are vast. My leadership started as an RCBA Board member. Serving on the Board gave me the opportunity to understand the structure of our association and meet even more of our

outstanding members. It only became clearer to me how closely my values as a lawyer are in align with the RCBA's mission. From the start, I felt welcomed into the RCBA. The supportive environment has made it easy in taking on leadership roles.

### 4 What are you most looking forward to in your year as president?

I am most looking forward to continuing to support our members by providing opportunities that allow for professional growth, and safely welcoming us all together with in-person engagement, while balancing online options. I am also excited about continuing to develop our presence in our diverse communities by providing impactful ways for members to serve.

### 5 What are some of the RCBA's goals and initiatives for the 2021-2022 bar year?

As the pandemic continues on the downward slide, the RCBA is working to re-connect all of our members—from new legal professionals to members of the Bench—and provide the support needed so our members can succeed. We want to expand our membership so that all legal professionals can benefit from the unique opportunities the RCBA has to offer. The RCBA is conscious of the inequality and lack of access to justice that many face in our communities. We intentionally and purposefully are committed to fulfilling the mission of the RCBA with an equitable, inclusive and diverse lens.

### 6 What's some of the best professional advice you've received?

To be prepared and to ask questions.

### 7 How do you manage stress and find balance?

I enjoy spending time with my family, running, and traveling.

### 8 What's your favorite show to binge?

I do not watch a lot of television, but if I would binge on a show, it would be “This is Us”.

### 9 What's a song that always makes you dance?

Any Colombian Cumbia!

### 10 Favorite snack or dessert?

Apple crisp with cinnamon ice cream

# Ramsey County Attorney's Office Creates Sentencing Review Unit

## *Q&A with Michelle Monteiro, Assistant Ramsey County Attorney*

### *What is sentencing review and why is it necessary?*

The United States is the country with the highest incarceration rate in the world. We have 22 million individuals incarcerated in our nation's prisons and jails, which has increased 500% over the last 40 years. ([www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts](http://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts).) That increase is, in large part, the result of excessive prison sentences handed down during the "tough-on-crime era" of the criminal legal system, which disproportionately harmed people of color. Thousands of people continue to be locked inside prisons serving sentences that would never be imposed today.

In response to this awareness, some prosecutors' offices across the country have started up internal review units to facilitate sentencing review. That can include prosecutor-initiated sentencing adjustments of individual sentences as well as developing policies, practices, and reforms to prevent unduly harsh sentences on the front end.

The Ramsey County Attorney's Office intends to help right the wrongs of our past by establishing an internal sentencing review unit to review and correct extreme, disproportionate, and unjust sentences. I was hired at the Ramsey County Attorney's Office in February of 2021 to work on sentencing and conviction review. Right now, my main focus is on sentencing review.

### *What type of work will the sentencing review unit be doing?*

Our unit is working on a plan to review claims that a sentence is unfairly harsh and no longer serves the interests of justice. We have assembled a Sentencing Review Advisory Board to help us decide what type of cases to review and set priorities. Our board will include people with both professional and life

experiences that can help us decide how to proceed. We also hope to develop sentencing policy, for example, making sure prosecuting attorneys are aware of any mitigating factors about a defendant early enough in the proceedings that they can be considered.

### *What kinds of cases will you review?*

Our sentencing review procedures will address the incarceration of individuals serving lengthy sentences who no longer pose a serious risk to public safety. We are seeking guidance from our Sentencing Review Advisory Board on what this will look like.

In February, we obtained data from the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) on all incarcerated individuals serving Ramsey County sentences. We are partnering with a non-profit group called For the People. They are helping us analyze our DOC population and identify possible individuals who no longer pose a serious risk to public safety and could be considered for review. They will also assist us with outreach with the incarcerated people we are considering for review.

### *What legal mechanisms are available for prosecutor-initiated sentencing adjustments in Minnesota?*

Prosecutors in Minnesota have complete discretion in charging, plea agreements, dismissing cases, and recommending sentences. After a defendant is sentenced, however, there are currently very limited legal mechanisms available to initiate prosecutor-initiated sentence adjustments.

Rep. Kelly Moller, DFL-Shoreview, has sponsored a bill in the MN House of Representatives that would establish a process and create a legal mechanism for prosecutor-initiated sentence adjustments. The proposed law is based on a California law, Assembly Bill 2942, which



passed in 2019. Minnesota House File 901 would give prosecutors discretion to review individual cases any time after the initial sentencing. If the prosecutor believes there should be a downward sentencing adjustment, they would be able to file a motion with the sentencing judge. The ultimate decision would rest with the Court.

This bill would create a clear process for prosecutor-initiated sentencing adjustments that do not currently exist in Minnesota. It would give prosecutors statewide the tools needed to review and correct extreme, disproportionate, and unjust sentences.

### *What is your background?*

I am a St. Paul native. I attended college at College of St. Catherine and law school at William Mitchell College of

Law. I started as a law clerk in the Hennepin County Public Defender's Office in 1995 and worked as an attorney there from 1998-2016. I then moved to Bismarck, ND and worked as an Assistant Federal Defender in western North Dakota for five years.

I have been interested in conviction and sentencing review for quite some time. When I found out the Ramsey County Attorney's Office was looking for an attorney to work in this area, I jumped at the chance and was lucky enough to be hired for the position. I am excited at the opportunity to assist the Ramsey County Attorney's Office in reviewing

individuals serving lengthy sentences who no longer pose a serious risk to public safety.

*The Ramsey County Attorney's Office intends to help right the wrongs of our past by establishing an internal sentencing review unit to review and correct extreme, disproportionate, and unjust sentences.*

## Whenever. Wherever.

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[mnbar.org/members/cle-events/rcba-on-demand-cle](http://mnbar.org/members/cle-events/rcba-on-demand-cle)



# Ramsey County Courthouse Remodels and Repurposes Mothers Room

As of 2021, visiting attorneys, their staff, and other members of the public now have access to the Ramsey County Courthouse Mothers Room.

When a concerned mother came to the RCBA Diversity Committee requesting help on creating a mothers room for attorneys and their staff while at the courthouse, we knew this was a project that we could accomplish. Before 2021, the courthouse had a space for its current employees (as required by Minn. Stat. 181.939) and jury members but did not have any available space for visiting attorneys and their staff. The Ramsey County Bar Association Diversity Committee worked with judges, courthouse staff and county staff on this project for the past year and are excited to say that the mothers room is now open for use.

Throughout my time on this project, I have heard from mothers sharing their experiences of pumping in their cars, in bathroom stalls, or in other inconvenient or uncomfortable spaces. Additionally, the RCBA Diversity Committee sponsored a CLE featuring Jacquelyn Lutz discussing Minnesota law surrounding breastfeeding. Overall, this project has showcased that mothers rooms should be normalized in all places of work, including courthouses. The Ramsey County Courthouse is now officially one of those places.

The Ramsey County Courthouse mothers room is located in Room 90 in the lower level of the Courthouse across the hall from the jury registration room. The mothers room has a keypad and deadbolt. The keypad has a red and green light—red meaning the room is in use.

If RCBA members have questions about the Ramsey County Courthouse Mothers Room, please contact Racey Rodney (rrodne@mcfarg.com) with the RCBA Diversity Committee. Additionally, if you have any thoughts or suggestions on other projects that the RCBA Diversity Committee should be tackling, please contact us and we would be happy to discuss such projects.

By: Racey Rodney | McEllistrem, Fargione,  
Rorvig & Moe, P.A.



## MEMBER NEWS

**Samantha Ivey** and **Gail Matthey** have joined Atticus Family Law, S.C.

The Minnesota State Bar Association is proud to recognize RCBA members and attorneys throughout the state who provided 50 hours or more of pro bono legal services last year as North Star Lawyers. View the 2020 list here: [www.mnbar.org/northstar](http://www.mnbar.org/northstar)

Submit your member news to Barrister Editor **Bethany Lenderink** at [blenderink@mnbars.org](mailto:blenderink@mnbars.org).

## CLASSIFIED ADS

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