

Nadeem Bezar: Expanding Advocacy for Survivors of Sex Abuse and Human Trafficking

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Max Mitchell

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Many personal injury lawyers focus their advocacy on representing the injured in court, but Nadeem Bezar, a finalist for The Legal’s 2022 Attorney of the Year, has moved his advocacy from the courtroom, to the state capital, and now out into the streets of Pennsylvania.

Bezar, a Kline & Specter attorney who focuses on representing child survivors of sexual abuse and human trafficking, has recently begun a project with students he teaches at Temple’s Beasley School of Law to track down former abuse victims who have gone missing. It started earlier this year with an independent study project aimed at locating a former client who had been abused.

The project involved driving to the former client’s hometown, meeting with family members, members of the community and anyone who might know anything about the youth, who had been missing for some time.

“Unfortunately we found that the young man had been murdered, but we were able to provide some closure to the family,” Bezar said.

Despite the sad news, Bezar said he saw the law students “light up,” as they immersed themselves in the hometown and sat with the family in their living room, not taking notes, but just listening and experiencing it all.

It was a highlight in a long career, already filled with successes, Bezar said.

It was not the only terrible news Bezar would experience during that time. Shortly after the project wrapped up, Bezar’s 20-year-old daughter, Mia, died. Bezar said he now plans to expand this new project—which he refers to using Gen Z lingo as his “side hustle”—to search for more youths who have gone missing in the hopes of doing what he can to give back.

“At what might be the saddest time of my life with the loss of my daughter, I feel very fortunate to be able to be working on behalf of these children,” Bezar said.

The new endeavor comes after a particularly successful year working on behalf of abuse survivors. In February 2021, he and David Williams won a \$2.5 million judgment in a precedent-setting case for a Rhode Island School of Design student who was raped during a study abroad program. Working with Emily Marks and Kyle Nocho—attorneys Bezar said are integral members of his team at Kline & Specter—Bezdar secured more than \$15 million in settlements from child placement and child welfare foster agencies in the fall, and also fought to ensure a cluster of sex trafficking suits against a hotel that would be litigated in state rather than federal court.

Winning the \$2.5 million judgement involved participating in a trial conducted entirely over the videoconferencing platform, Zoom, which, according to Bezar, required a lot of forethought and attention to detail. Bezar said his goal in all cases is to make sure not just to speak, but to be heard as well, and that can be tricky when those presiding over the case can only see you as a two-inch-by-two-inch square.

Trying the case remotely involved revamping a conference room so the lawyers could appear more like they were sitting in a courtroom, Bezar said. The lawyers also stood up when they addressed the court, and used closed captioning for some of their witnesses from overseas who testified with thick accents. Defense counsel, Bezar noted by contrast, presented their case sitting at a computer with a headset on.

“I thought that was sort of minimizing it,” Bezar said. “Life is three-dimensional. Her harm was three-dimensional.”

The work Bezar focuses on deals with a relatively nascent area of law. In 2008, Congress expanded the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, to allow for civil claims against anyone involved in the entire list of trafficking-related offenses, and since then states have also begun passing laws targeting trafficking activities to varying degrees. In 2014, Pennsylvania passed its anti-trafficking law, which allows for treble damages if the conduct is determined to be willful.

Bezdar has long been at the forefront of this type of litigation. In 2017, he and Marks filed the first case in Pennsylvania—and possibly the country—seeking civil penalties against a motel for sex trafficking. In 2021, Bezdar and his team also worked up what would likely be the first civil human trafficking lawsuit trial in the country, but the defendant hotel filed for bankruptcy on the eve of trial, Bezdar said.

Bezdar is also an advocate behind the scenes, and over the winter he brought his expertise to the state capital, where he provided testimony against a measure proposing to place a \$500,000 cap on civil damages for lawsuits against child welfare agencies. Backers of the bill said it was aimed at tackling an “insurance crisis” affecting youth social services providers, but Bezdar countered that the measure passes the financial burden from those who harmed the already-marginalized children onto the taxpayers, who will pay for their survivor’s lifelong treatments through the Medicare and the Department of Welfare systems.

Like much of his other work, Bezdar said he was compelled to speak out against the bill out of a sense of duty to the survivors, who, he noted, are disproportionately Black and children of color.

“It comes from a position of feeling blessed in my own life and now it’s time to turn around and give back,” Bezdar said. “At 57 it gets you out of bed in the morning and gets you going.” **suing timely decisions.**”