



PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

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ATTORNEY OF THE YEAR FINALIST

Boies Schiller's Sigrid McCawley Fights for Jeffrey Epstein Victims

by Catherine Wilson

In quick succession, millionaire pedophile Jeffrey Epstein was arrested, faced the release of previously sealed documents and died by suicide in a New York jail.

Days later, a federal judge allowed a handful of Epstein's accusers to air their experiences in court for the first time last year.

It was a whirlwind end to a sexual trafficking drama that began when a 14-year-old reported her abuse to Palm Beach police 14 years earlier. Investigators eventually tied him to the sexual abuse of hundreds of girls and women.

Sigrid McCawley, Boies Schiller Flexner's Fort Lauderdale co-administrative partner, worked pro bono representing 10 victims for years. Virginia Roberts Giuffre was the first to come to her.

"Certainly when I first met with Virginia, I realized the depth and breadth and the seriousness of this case, but I had no idea it would consume my life and my every moment," McCawley said. "It was a journey I would never change."

When she first got involved, "it was a much different environment. Victims were not believed."

Epstein's legal dream team negotiated a federal nonprosecution agreement and a state conviction that put him in jail at night for 13 months. The federal agreement would lead to the downfall in 2019 of Treasury Secretary Alex Acosta, who approved the federal deal as Miami U.S. attorney.

It was the same year Prince Andrew dropped his royal duties based on Roberts' accusations that she was trafficked by Epstein and alleged recruiter Ghislaine Maxwell to the prince when she was 17. Maxwell was jailed without bond in July.

When McCawley tried "to get creative" to expose the trafficking and abuse, she filed a civil defamation suit against Maxwell on Roberts' behalf in 2015. It settled in 2017.

She filed claims against Epstein's \$630 million estate under a victims' compensation fund that opened in June.

McCawley was interviewed at home for the Netflix documentary "Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich" based on the book by acclaimed author and fellow Palm Beach resident James Patterson.

Camera crews taped McCawley and her four children at home, but the kids were aghast when they realized they ended up on the cutting-room floor. But four of her clients were in the wrenching four-part series released in May.

McCawley said the firm's Epstein-related time left her "just completely underwater" and amounted to "certainly in the high millions in attorney fee hours."

The work was an outgrowth of a program started five years ago at the firm for victims of sexual trafficking. Its early work contributed to the shutdown of the Backpage.com website in 2018.

The promotional poster for the series features Epstein's face as a graphic compilation incorporating snapshots of girls at the age they were when they were first introduced to him. One was in braces, others were in the eighth and ninth grades.

"There was so much in 2019. It's actually one of the years I look at in disbelief," McCawley said.

The public fall of a high-profile, well-connected predator prone to threats brought about a sea change in attitudes. She said, "Victims are feeling more confident coming forward, which is a beautiful thing to be involved with."

Epstein no longer dominates her litigation practice.

"Certainly the Epstein survivors that I still represent take a portion of my time, but I would say that I'm much more back into my commercial practice mode now that we've gotten to the place we are," she said.

McCawley joined the firm's executive committee this year and is lead counsel for Trividia Health Inc. in its dispute against a Japanese medical equipment maker in a high-stakes arbitration.



Sigrid McCawley