UNIVERSITY OF **HOUSTON** LAW CENTER

FAMILY VIOLENCE IN FOCUS: TOOLS, TRENDS, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED LAW PRACTICE



Friday, October 30, 2026

9:00 AM-1:00 PM Central Time

Virtual via Zoom

Approved for 4.0 hours of Texas MCLE credit

This course has been approved by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization for certification and recertification continuing legal education requirements for attorneys and paralegals in the following specialty fields:

Child Welfare Law (4.0 hours) and Family Law (4.0 hours)

In partnership with

AVDA | end abuse begin again®

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Agenda

9:00–9:30AM

Why this Education Matters to Your Law Practice: Statistics, PO Effectiveness, and Preventive Measures

Maisha Colter, LCSW, JD
Chief Executive Officer
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse

9:30–10:00AM

Protective Order Law Update: Practice, Procedure, and Pitfalls

Melissa Cass Pickett
Associate
Jenkins & Kamin LLP

10:00–10:30AM

Holding Harm Doers Accountable: Legal and Community Strategies in Family Violence

Allison Guerra, LPC
Director of Battering Intervention and Prevention
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse

10:30–11:00AM

Judicial Perspective: Do's and Don'ts Before the Bench

The Honorable Richard T. Bell
Judge, 501st District Court, Fort Bend County
Adjunct Professor, University of Houston Law Center

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Agenda

11:00AM-12:00PM

Who is Walking Through Your Office Door? How to Recognize and Raise the Issue of Family Violence in Court

Maisha Colter, LCSW, JD
Chief Executive Officer
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse

John Reyes
Prevention and Education Manager
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse

12:00-12:30PM

Protective Orders & Safety Plans: A Practitioner's Guide to Risk, Response, and Enforcement

The Honorable Barbara J. Stalder
Former Judge of the 280th Judicial District Court
Adjunct Professor, University of Houston Law Center
Senior Associate, Eaton Law Firm

12:30-1:00PM

Grave Risk Across Borders: Family Violence in Hague Convention Litigation

Madeline Bergstrom
Associate Attorney
Skillern Firm

The Honorable Janet B. Heppard
Retired – Presiding Judge, 387th State District Court
Adjunct Professor, University of Houston Law Center



THE HONORABLE RICHARD T. BELL
Judge, 501st District Court, Fort Bend County
Adjunct Professor, University of Houston Law Center

Judge Richard T. Bell was appointed to the 501st District Court December 1, 2025. Judge Bell graduated with a Doctor of Jurisprudence from South Texas College of Law in May 1997 and earned a Bachelor of Arts Business Degree from Southwestern University in 1994.

After graduation from law school, Judge Bell began concentrating his legal practice on family law, handling cases throughout the State of Texas. He maintained a successful legal practice handling complex property cases and child custody disputes for nearly twenty years. During his years of private practice, Judge Bell was regularly recognized by the State Bar of Texas as a member of the Pro Bono College, an organization devoted to helping individuals that are unable to afford legal services.

Judge Bell is an active member in the legal field as well as the local community. He regularly speaks at continuing legal education courses assisting lawyers to stay abreast of important changes in the law. Judge Bell currently serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center. He served on the State Bar of Texas Grievance Committee for the four years immediately prior to taking the bench. He is a former president of the Fort Bend County Bar Association as well as the Fort Bend County Dispute Resolution Center.

In addition to his contributions to the legal field, Judge Bell is an active member of the local community. He regularly sits on the boards of local non-profit organizations and has held officer positions in many of those organizations. In 2022, he served as the president of the Exchange Club of Sugar Land and for several years he was the treasurer of the Sugar Land Little League. Judge Bell is passionate about serving the needs of others within his community.



MADELINE BERGSTROM
Associate Attorney
Skillern Firm

Madeline earned her J.D. from Texas A&M University School of Law in May 2022. During law school, she served in the Immigrant Rights Clinic and Innocence Project Clinic, developing a strong commitment to advocating for vulnerable populations. Her work with the Immigrant Rights Clinic earned her a Clinical Legal Education Association (CLEA) award and included advocacy concerning reports of nonconsensual surgeries and unnecessary medical procedures at Georgia's Irwin County Detention Center. She is a member of the Texas Bar College and was selected to the Texas Rising Stars list by Super Lawyers in 2025 and 2026.

Madeline is an associate attorney at Skillern Firm Divorce & Child Custody Lawyers in Houston, Texas. She practices exclusively in family law throughout Harris and surrounding counties. Madeline is especially passionate about advocating for families and children in crisis, including survivors of domestic abuse. Her approach combines compassionate advocacy with legal strategies tailored to the needs and safety of her clients and their children.

Before pursuing law, Madeline worked as a preschool teacher and paralegal. These experiences inform her understanding of children's needs and the challenges families face. She holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees, one in Religious Studies and one in English Literature, from Pacific Lutheran University.

Outside her practice, Madeline enjoys traveling, thrift shopping, and exploring new cuisines.



MAISHA COLTER, LCSW, JD

Chief Executive Officer
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)

Maisha Colter, LCSW, JD, has dedicated her professional life to advocating for the needs of children and families in crisis. Maisha has always found work that allows her to draw on the strengths of her educational training in social work and law.

Maisha attended school in New York, graduating from Syracuse University with dual bachelor's degrees in social work and public policy. After obtaining her master's degree in social work from New York University, Maisha was a licensed social worker in Brooklyn, New York, working tirelessly with children and families involved with the State's Child Protective Services Authority. She received her law degree from Rutgers University in 2001.

After relocating to Texas in 2003, she learned about AVDA and reached out to the Executive Director to volunteer and was instead hired as the agency's only staff attorney in 2004. She remained with the agency for almost 4 years and returned in 2012 to lead the distinguished staff of attorneys and paralegals charged with fighting on behalf of countless victims of domestic abuse in Harris, Fort Bend, Austin, Grimes, Waller and Washington Counties. She was selected after a nationwide search to serve as AVDA's Chief Executive Officer on August 1, 2019.

BIOGRAPHIES



ALLISON GUERRA, LPC

Director of Battering Intervention and Prevention
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse

Through her passion for social change, Allison has risen through the ranks of AVDA's Battering Intervention and Prevention Program (BIPP). She began work at AVDA in 2016 as the part-time BIPP Program Assistant. She immediately expressed interest in group facilitation and began to assist in the Spanish BIPP groups. Eventually she became full-time staff, and while working, she obtained her bachelor's degree in psychology and master's of education in counseling and development. She recently became a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC).



THE HONORABLE JANET B. HEPPARD

Retired – Presiding Judge, 387th State District Court
Adjunct Professor, University of Houston Law Center

Judge Janet B. Heppard is retired as the presiding judge of the 387th State District (Family) Court in Fort Bend County, Texas. She is a graduate of the University of Houston (UHLC) with a joint JD/MBA degree after working as a geophysicist at Amoco Production Company in Houston, Texas, prior to law school.

Judge Heppard worked in the clinical program at UHLC beginning in 1995, first as a staff attorney and later as director of the Civil Practice Clinic, becoming the Clinic Director in 2008 and a full Clinical Professor in 2019 before retiring in December 2020 to begin her judicial term. Judge Heppard retired from the bench in December 2024 and continues to teach at UHLC as an adjunct in the areas of family violence and Immigration and Family Law and to provide pro bono legal assistance to low-income members of the community.

BIOGRAPHIES



MELISSA CASS PICKETT

Associate
Jenkins & Kamin LLP

Melissa Cass Pickett received her law degree from South Texas College of Law in 2007. In her final year as a law student, she was privileged to handle protective order hearings in the Harris County District Family Courts with a third-year student bar card sponsored by the Harris County District Attorney's Office. After her licensure in 2008, Melissa provided family law services to indigent survivors of family and dating violence at the non-profit agency Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, then transitioned in 2013 to private practice representing clients in divorce, paternity, child support, and protective order cases.

Melissa holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from the University of Houston. In addition to her law practice, she recently completed two three-year terms on Panel 5 of the State Bar Grievance Committee, which considers complaints involving lawyer conduct. She is currently the Continuing Legal Education Chair for the Northeast Harris County Bar Association. Melissa believes that zealous advocacy in the courtroom is only one component of practicing law, and that it is equally important to have compassion and understanding for the circumstances and challenges that clients face in their family law matters.

Outside of her work hours, Melissa enjoys spending time with her family, as well as gardening, baking, and restoring vintage cast iron.



JOHN REYES

Prevention and Education Manager
Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse

John Reyes is the Prevention and Education Manager at Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA) and has served in this role since 2019. John has over 20 years of experience working with youth, teens and families, providing services and programs to help build well balanced young people and strong communities. He has done this through teaching, program delivery, program management, case management, basic needs assistance and basic relationship building throughout his career.

BIOGRAPHIES



THE HONORABLE BARBARA J. STALDER

Former Judge of the 280th Judicial District Court
Adjunct Professor, University of Houston Law Center
Senior Associate, Eaton Law Firm

Barbara J. Stalder is a seasoned attorney and nationally recognized expert in domestic violence law, with a career spanning over three decades dedicated to advocacy, education, and justice. She began her legal journey as an Equal Justice Works Fellow, where she founded a nonprofit organization focused on representing children in cases involving abuse, neglect, and family violence.

Barbara went on to serve as an attorney with Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA), providing critical legal support to individuals escaping violent relationships through protective orders, divorce, and custody proceedings. Her commitment to empowering survivors led her back to her alma mater, the University of Houston Law Center, where she spent eight years as a Clinical Supervising Attorney in the Civil Clinic, mentoring law students in live-client representation and courtroom practice.

Transitioning into private practice, Barbara specialized in high-conflict family law and mediation, earning a reputation for her skillful handling of complex cases. In 2018, she was elected to serve as the Presiding Judge of the 280th District Court—Texas's Domestic Violence Court— where she presided for four years, championing justice for survivors and families in crisis. After her tenure on the bench, Barbara returned to AVDA as Managing Attorney, leading a team of attorneys and paralegals in providing comprehensive legal services to victims of domestic violence. As of May 2025, she resumed private practice and continues to serve as an Adjunct Professor at UH Law, shaping the next generation of legal professionals.

Outside the courtroom, Barbara is a devoted wife to Fred of over 32 years, a proud pet parent to her beloved furkids, and an enthusiastic supporter of her Super Bowl Champion Kansas City Chiefs.

For more information about upcoming events and programs at the University of Houston Law Center:

www.law.uh.edu/cle/

For more information about Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)

www.avda.org

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The University of Houston Law Center is part of a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university and an EEO institution.