

Kris Lawless, JHC's Longest-Serving Attorney, Retires

KRIS Lawless, who began her career with JHC before the firm—as we know it today—was born, has retired. As a single mom in the late '80s, Kris worked as a legal assistant for the former Joseph, Robison & Anderson firm while finishing college at Wichita State University. Steve Joseph—who later co-founded JHC—encouraged her law school aspirations.

“Steve had a deep love for the law—a passion carried forward by Chris Joseph today,” Kris said. “I have so much respect for Chris. His loyalty toward every attorney is the hallmark of leadership.”

After graduating from Washburn University School of Law, Kris took a position with the Shawnee County Public Defender's Office. While there, she handled a routine drug case that turned into a Pandora's Box of police corruption, leading to the ouster of the sheriff. Afterward, Steve Joseph invited her to join his new law firm, The Joseph Firm, PA.

In private practice, Kris handled multiple high-profile state and federal criminal defense cases, including a Sumner County case that, in addition to winning a jury verdict of “not guilty,” also earned death threats for Kris and her co-counsel. As soon as the verdict was announced, they were given a police escort out of town, along with sharpshooters on the courthouse roof to ensure their safety.



KRIS LAWLESS

Years later, a life-altering experience changed the trajectory of Kris' legal career. On her way to court, a motorist speeding through a crosswalk struck Kris and injured her badly.

“It was horrific, but the lawyer in me was still at fever pitch. Sitting in the ambulance, I was calling my client with instructions for court. Chris Joseph literally pried the phone out of my hand.”

After four months of recovery, Kris' perspective on life and the law changed. She limited her practice—then primarily devoted to family law—to serving as a mediator and conciliator for domestic cases.

Now, after nearly four decades with the JHC family, Kris is focused on her own family—and a life of kayaking, hiking, and biking the annual 500-mile Bike Across Kansas. Her easel and acrylics palette are set up, too.

Thank you, Kris, for your dedication to JHC and our clients. Here's wishing you placid waters, happy trails, and smooth canvases for all the days ahead.

Kindling, Bellquist Win Medical Malpractice Trial

OF the many medical malpractice lawsuits filed in Kansas every year, only a handful ever reach the courtroom for trial. Yet, in June 2023, Anne Kindling and Diane Bellquist secured a complete defense verdict in one of those cases. The six-day trial ended with a verdict fully vindicating JHC's client, a physician assistant accused of causing permanent nerve injury by negligently ordering a medication administered by intramuscular injection.

The trial victory protected our client and her insurance company from nearly \$2 million in claimed damages.



ANNE KINDLING



DIANE BELLQUIST

“The co-defendant's settlement prior to trial presented an opportunity we used to our client's advantage,” said Anne. Anne artfully cross-examined the plaintiff's own expert witnesses to support the client's defense and cast doubt on the actions of others.

“We supported our client's medical decision-making and were honored to be her advocates throughout the lengthy litigation process,” Anne continued. “She was so confident in her testimony that, after trial, a juror complimented her, saying he hoped his daughters would someday be as strong.”

Anne's practice includes medical malpractice defense, health and hospital law, and general defense litigation. Diane represents healthcare providers and other licensed professionals during disciplinary investigations and proceedings as well as related matters with the potential to jeopardize their ability to continue practicing.

In addition to Anne and Diane, JHC's trial team included summer associate Samantha “Sammi” Fisher, a third-year law student at UMKC, who will join JHC's health law team full time in 2024.



SAMMI FISHER

“On Sammi's very first day as a summer associate, she got to assist in a major trial. The opportunities the firm provides for hands-on experiences like this are one of the many reasons law students aspire to intern here.”

Hoeme Wins Dismissal of Murder Charge Live on CourtTV



Live on CourtTV, Jess Hoeme embraces client Ashley Pearson following the dismissal.

IN a victory broadcast live by Court TV in August, criminal defense attorney Jess Hoeme secured a full dismissal of a second-degree murder charge for his client, Ashley Pearson, during a pretrial hearing centered on Kansas' Stand Your Ground law.

“Many cases can be won in pretrial immunity hearings,” says Jess, who has successfully defended his clients' justified use of force in half a dozen homicide and manslaughter cases over the past several years.

Pearson, a young mother and victim of domestic violence, fatally stabbed her boyfriend in 2019.

Recognizing that Pearson had acted in self-defense, the Sumner County prosecutor at the time of the killing refused to file charges. However, in 2022, a new prosecutor reviewed the case and charged Pearson with second-degree murder.

“My client was a woman with a history of abuse at the hands of her boyfriend—abuse that was witnessed by others,” Jess said. “Fortunately, the judge saw that her actions were clearly self-defense.”

Pearson's hearing was expected to span several days, but the judge dismissed the charges after only one day, stating: “The evidence I heard today [is] that [the deceased] no doubt had a reputation for violence amongst family... the question was whether or not the use of force became objectively reasonable... Of course it was... it would have been objectively unreasonable to not do anything.”

A second national network also filmed the hearing and plans to release a documentary this spring.

JHC Family Law Team Grows Again by Three

JH C's family law practice grew again in 2023 as three new attorneys joined our team. “While their practices all include matters of divorce, paternity, child custody, child support, and spousal maintenance, their collective graduate and law school advocacy experiences as are as diverse as the clients we serve,” said JHC's family law practice leader, Julia Craft.

Mackenzie Orchard joined our Wichita office from another area firm. A graduate of the University of Nebraska College of Law, Mackenzie worked as a guardian ad litem (GAL) in child in need of care (CINC) cases in Nebraska's Lancaster County, where she first developed an interest in family law.

After earning a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and certificates in victim advocacy, law and courts, and global leadership from Fort Hays State University,



MACKENZIE ORCHARD



MARISA NO



KYLEE TOKOI

she earned a master's degree in professional studies, concentrating in criminal justice. Between graduate school and law school, Mackenzie served as academic coordinator for Barton Community College's Central Kansas Upward Bound program, advising first-generation and lower-income students.

Marisa No, who started with JHC as a summer associate in 2022, joined us in our KC office full time in 2023 as a Missouri-licensed attorney. A graduate of Washburn University School of Law, where she served as editor-in-chief of the *Washburn Law Journal*, Marisa earned certificates in family law and advocacy along with her

J.D. In addition, she earned a CALI Excellence for the Future Award in Domestic Violence for her work with the Washburn Law Clinic, where she represented clients in paternity and guardianship cases, and with CASA in Johnson and Wyandotte Counties, where she still volunteers today. Marisa earned her bachelor's degree in political science from Hunter College in New York.

Kylee Tokoi joined our Lawrence office, bringing experience from the Douglas County District Attorney's Office. As an intern and attorney, Kylee handled juvenile offender and CINC cases. She also worked with the Disability Rights Center, representing clients in property, housing, family law, civil rights, education, employment, and healthcare matters.

A Colorado State University alumnus, Kylee earned a bachelor's degree in political science with a concentration in global politics and policy, and a minor in anthropology. She earned her J.D. from Washburn University School of Law.

Governor Appoints Dustin Curry to Kansas Sentencing Commission



DUSTIN CURRY

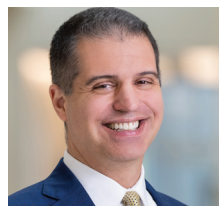
IN June, Gov. Laura Kelly appointed JHC's Dustin Curry to the Kansas Sentencing Commission, filling the only seat allotted for private defense counsel.

"I'm honored by the appointment and eager to contribute to the Commission's work regarding fair sentencing and incarceration guidelines," said Dustin, who has tried more than 50 state and federal jury trials throughout his career as Shawnee County Deputy District Attorney, Special Assistant United States Attorney, and as a member of JHC's criminal defense and personal injury teams.

"Over the years, the Commission has successfully advised the Governor and Legislature, helping them address inequities in sentencing guidelines. Now, it's studying the prison system itself," he explained. "We're asking tough questions about best practices for reducing prison populations and reevaluating how we utilize the prison space we have. I'm looking forward to being part of this."

Christopher Joseph Joins KU Law Board of Governors

THE University of Kansas School of Law welcomed Christopher Joseph (L'00) to its Board of Governors in 2023, to serve through 2027. The Board, which is composed entirely of alumni, is dedicated to advancing the intellectual and material development, growth, and continued excellence of KU Law.



CHRISTOPHER JOSEPH

Chris' interest in the law school's success extends to his role as Managing Member of Joseph, Hollander & Craft. JHC has counted several Jayhawk lawyers among its ranks and offers experiential learning opportunities to KU Law students through its summer associate program. The firm also enjoys its partnership with KU Law Professor Mike Hoeflich, with whom it produces the free, monthly Legal Ethics & Malpractice Reporter covering current developments in ethics and malpractice law.

"It was a privilege to attend KU Law, and I couldn't have asked for a better legal education," Chris said. "The Board of Governors includes some of the finest lawyers in the country. I'm looking forward to serving with them as we continue the school's tradition of excellence. Rock Chalk!"

Jess Hoeme Educates Kansas Law Enforcement, Bond Agents

JUST as lawyers must attend annual CLEs, law enforcement professionals undergo similar training. JHC's Jess Hoeme—who frequently represents Kansas law enforcement officers and departments facing accusations of misconduct—has earned a reputation as one of the state's go-to continuing educators for LEOs.

Jess provided two programs for the Kansas Peace Officers Association in 2023—one on officer-involved critical incidents and another on de-escalation. He also presented five sessions for the Kansas Bail Agents Association, covering forfeiture, fugitive extradition, the use of force, and limitations when serving warrants. For his efforts, Jess received the KBAA's 2023 Excellence in Education Award (pictured, far right).



"Teaching these programs is among my favorite things to do," says Jess, who also offers continuing legal education for attorneys. "It's critical for law enforcement and bondsmen to understand how their actions can impact a case. The more they know about the law, the more likely it is that justice will be served."

Rachel Whitsitt Establishes Collaborative Family Law Practice

COLLABORATIVE law, a form of Alternative Dispute Resolution, has been gaining popularity in the Kansas City metro—and for clients of JHC's Overland Park-based attorney Rachel Whitsitt. Rachel started her collaborative practice early in 2023 after completing the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals' training program.

With encouraging results and growing demand, she aims to help the firm serve a greater number of clients through this approach in Greater KC and beyond.

Combining the advantages of mediation and litigation while avoiding their biggest drawbacks, collaborative divorce is distinct from both. This team approach to problem solving leverages the expertise of a neutral CPA and family therapist working alongside lawyers representing each party.



RACHEL WHITSITT

"Collaborative divorce is far less antagonistic and less stressful on both sides," Rachel says. "More and more divorces are settling out of court. This option makes the procedure far more efficient, cost-effective, and faster, on average taking only three months."

It also keeps matters out of the courtroom—and the public eye—which better maintains parties' privacy.

That's not to say that the approach is right for everyone.

"Collaborative divorce may not work for every situation, so I won't stop my litigation practice any time soon," says Rachel, whose experience includes high-asset divorce cases and complex child custody and child support situations. "But this is an alternative I am happy to be able to offer our clients."

CLE Attendance Grows 54% in 2023 to Nearly 4,000

THE popularity of JHC's free ethics CLEs soared to new heights in 2023, thanks to a slate of excellent presenters speaking on vital subjects both timely and timeless. After our fifth year offering these programs to members of the Kansas and Missouri bars, they've earned a reputation for quality. Partnering with KU Law professor Mike Hoeflich, JHC's legal ethics and malpractice group, composed of Diane Bellquist, Christopher Joseph, Christopher McHugh, and Carrie Parker, was formed to advance and preserve the integrity of the legal profession across America's Heartland.

This round of CLEs covered ethical issues regarding generative AI, alternative fee arrangements, criminal defense practice, and the pillars of professionalism. The firm also broke new ground in offering a hybrid program in collaboration with the Tenth Circuit Historical Society. Hosted at the Robert Dole Federal Courthouse in Kansas City, KS and live-streamed on Zoom, "Federalism on Trial: State Attorneys General and National Policymaking in Contemporary America" featured a panel discussion among Marquette Professor Paul Nolette and former Kansas Attorneys General Derek Schmidt and Steve Six. A video recording of the program is available on the firm's YouTube channel.

For information about future CLE programs and to sign up for invites, visit josephhollander.com/ethics.

JHC Contributions Wrap Communities with Support

NO Year in Review would be complete without a salute to the outstanding work conducted by the nonprofit organizations JHC is pleased to support, whether financially or with gifts of time, workspace, or expertise. We honor those who provide *critical services* for children, *help* for those with physical disabilities or mental health issues, *hope* for those facing food insecurity, *promise* for those seeking education, *advocacy* for those seeking civil justice, and *love* for our fur babies.

JHC Earns 14th-Straight Best Law Firms® Ranking & 14 Individual Awards

RECOGNIZED BY
Best Lawyers®

Christopher Joseph	<i>Criminal Defense: General Practice</i>
Julia Craft	<i>Family Law</i>
Dionne Scherff	<i>Criminal Defense: General Practice DUI / DWI Defense</i>
Diane Bellquist	<i>Banking and Finance Law Ethics and Professional Responsibility</i>
Jess Hoeme	<i>Criminal Defense: General Practice DUI / DWI Defense</i>
Ardith Smith-Woertz	<i>Family Law, Family Law Mediation</i>
Christopher McHugh	<i>Criminal Defense: General Practice Cannabis Law</i>
Christine Rosengreen	<i>Family Law</i>
Casey Meek	<i>Criminal Defense: General Practice</i>
Rachel Whitsitt	<i>Family Law</i>

ONES TO WATCH®

B. Keith Edwards	<i>Criminal Defense: General Practice DUI / DWI Defense</i>
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Julia Craft	<i>Family Law • Wichita, KS</i>
Dionne Scherff	<i>Criminal Defense • Overland Park, KS</i>
Jess Hoeme	<i>Criminal Defense • Wichita, KS</i>
Diane Bellquist	<i>Professional Licensure Defense Overland Park & Topeka, KS</i>
Ardith Smith-Woertz	<i>Family Law • Topeka, KS</i>
Christopher McHugh	<i>Cannabis Law • Kansas City, MO</i>

RISING STARS®

Carrie Parker	<i>Criminal Defense • Lawrence, KS</i>
Casey Meek	<i>Criminal Defense • Kansas City, MO</i>
Rachel Whitsitt	<i>Family Law • Overland Park, KS</i>
B. Keith Edwards	<i>Criminal Defense • Wichita, KS</i>
Hannah Wittman	<i>Family Law • Topeka, KS</i>
Rylee Broyles	<i>Family Law • Wichita, KS</i>



Supported organizations:

- CASA
- Harvesters Community Food Network
- KU Endowment Association
- Mental Health Association of South Central Kansas (MHA)
- Overland Park Police Officers' Foundation
- Rainbows United
- Wichita Animal Action League (WAAL)



JHC Wichita elves wrap gifts for MHA.

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