

Nicole Livingston

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NICOLE LIVINGSTON IS A PARTNER

in the Trust & Estates Department at the Annapolis based firm Council, Baradel, Kosmerl & Nolan, PA. She dedicates her practice to estate planning, estate and trust administration, and elder law. With 21 years of experience under her belt, Livingston is a seasoned attorney, but the law is actually her second career.

A CAREER WITH TWO FULFILLING PROFESSIONS

Prior to becoming an attorney, Livingston worked as a speech-language pathologist (SLP) mostly in nursing homes with adult patients who were diagnosed with dysphagia, cerebral vascular accidents, traumatic brain injury, or degenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's.

A series of employer developments led Livingston to consider a different path. "The first company I worked for filed for bankruptcy eight months after I started, then dissolved. The second company I worked for filed for bankruptcy with a reorganization. They fired three of the five therapists in my facility. My colleague and I had seniority; however, our workload increased dramatically."

Facing burnout, Livingston decided to take a course at Anne Arundel Community College in the paralegal studies department. She enjoyed the evening classes and earned her paralegal certificate in about a year. The dean at the time suggested applying to law school. She took the LSAT and applied to the University of Baltimore.

Leaving her established profession and starting over wasn't easy. "Probably the biggest challenge was mentally giving up a career where I had to earn a bachelor's and master's degree to practice in addition to a Clinical Fellowship Year," she says. "My parents and friends had a hard time accepting me giving up my profession."

Now well into a successful legal career, Livingston discussed her experiences with MSBA.

➔ Describe how your prior career helped you in your new role in the legal profession.

There are more similarities than differences in my prior career to my current career. I evaluated and treated patients and now, I assess clients goals and values (evaluation) to draft an estate plan (treatment). My day consisted of meeting five or six patients a

day and now, I see three to four clients a day. A day in the life as an attorney is much easier than as a therapist. An SLP had to cross train with other disciplines (PT and OT) and we had to time our day to meet all the demands of a patient in a subacute facility. The SLP was often the spoke in a wheel educating nursing staff and family members regarding their dietary restrictions or their communication strategies. This interdisciplinary approach transitions nicely to working with CPAs, financial advisors, family members, and paralegals. The skill set I perfected as a speech language pathologist has allowed me to become a better attorney.

➔ What makes you unique in your profession?

I worked in all types of facilities from acute care to subacute to long term care and home health care. My years of experience treating patients and working with the nurses and other therapists gives me a unique perspective on helping my clients who are either in these facilities themselves or are seeking one for their family members.

➔ What are the best skills you bring to your legal career?

My interdisciplinary approach is a strong skill. My clients need a team approach for their estate plan. My background as a therapist allows me to be empathetic because I can visualize and relate to the experiences they may be facing. Communication and listening skills fine tuned as a SPL cross over well to assisting clients with difficult family situations.

➔ What are your goals for yourself in your current role?

My goal is to continue to spread the word that everyone needs a written, up to date

estate plan. I hope to continue to present seminars to new clients and professionals about the importance of estate planning.

➔ How has the MSBA helped you in your legal career?

Early on, I joined the section council for the Elder Law section. Meeting skilled practitioners and seeing how things work behind the scenes and the amount of time devoted to keeping the membership up to date and aware of changes was enlightening. A lot of people contribute so much of their time to help fellow members of the bar. The continuing education courses, bar events, section dinners, and the Legal Summit are all well worth attending and have provided immeasurable assistance in my career.

➔ Do you volunteer? If so, where?

Recently, I joined the University of Maryland Baltimore Washington Medical Center Foundation NextGen Committee to educate the public about the many programs and events at the hospital. It is a fundraising and volunteer organization to help UM BWMC provide the highest quality of healthcare to the communities it serves. If you have a chance to visit the Healing Garden (shown above), I recommend stopping by. It is very peaceful and an important project for the hospital.

