

Pashman Stein Walder Hayden Launches Public Interest Center

The Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center launched this week, through which Pashman Stein attorneys will be called on to provide pro bono counsel on impact litigation and appellate advocacy.

By Suzette Parmley

When he served 17 years on the state Supreme Court, former Justice Gary Stein was especially drawn to cases with the potential to alter public policy and have an impact. He said some of these significant cases raised issues that were “close to my heart.”

Pashman Stein Walder Hayden in Hackensack, the firm founded by his son, where Stein landed after his court career ended, found it fitting that Stein’s name be attached to the firm’s new center aimed at providing lawyers and advocacy groups throughout the state, such as the ACLU of New Jersey, the Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, among others, resources to argue the biggest cases of the day.

The Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center officially launched Monday. Through the program, Pashman Stein attorneys will be called on to provide pro bono work on impact litigation and appellate advocacy.

The common thread these cases will share, according to the center’s founders, is their aim in making a difference in constitutional law, voter disenfranchisement, free speech, government transparency, and school segregation, which has been a cause close to Stein.

“My father has devoted much of his professional career to public service and he has always believed that as lawyers we have a heightened respon-



Left to right: CJ Griffin, Gary Stein, Michael Stein/photo by Robert Wallace

sibility to use our resources to serve the public good,” said Michael Stein, the firm’s managing partner and founder, adding that his partners “gave a unanimous endorsement in naming this undertaking after him.”

Via amicus briefs and case law research, among other legal services, the center aims to make an imprint on important cases, said partner CJ Griffin, who will serve as its director.

“Certainly in the last six or seven years, there’s been a significant uptick in the amicus part in state Supreme Court,” said Griffin, known for handling public records and government transparency matters. “The purpose of the center is to advance the law and provide amicus support to attorneys who have cases before the appellate court who might need additional support.”

Griffin said the center “will generally identify an area of law, with either an absence of case law that needs to be litigated or an important public policy issue that needs to be litigated to a just result on behalf of a large of class of individuals.”

Griffin said the center is a firmwide initiative, and any lawyer in the firm can participate to do pro bono work.

The younger Stein said the firm, founded in 1995 and now with approximately 60 attorneys, and known for its work in public interest litigation and commercial litigation, is sending a twofold message with the center’s launch.

“Both internally and externally to the law community at large, the launch is saying we are investing and devoting even more resources and putting an even finer focus in

this area,” he said. “Attorneys are uniquely positioned to serve the public good. ... As an institution, the message we intend to send is, we can lean in and leave an imprint on the public issues of our time.”

The elder Stein said in a phone interview, “The idea that this law firm, with all the pressures lawyers experience in their day-to-day practice, are willing to make this commitment and be available to litigate cases in the public interest that are important and can change the law, to me that’s just wonderful.”

Since leaving the bench in 2002, Stein has served as special counsel to the firm, which became Pashman Stein Walder Hayden with the 2016 merger of Pashman Stein and Walder Hayden.

“We want to make sure the firm is available to participate in most, if not all, significant criminal justice and government transparency litigation that comes before the Supreme Court of New Jersey,” Stein said. “I think it will be of great benefit to the court” and “enhance the quality of justice in New Jersey for years to come,” he added.

Stein served on the New Jersey Supreme Court from January 1985 until September 2002, the sixth-longest tenure in the court’s history. Before that, he served as director of the Governor’s Office of Policy and Planning, from 1982 to 1985, for Gov. Tom Kean.

“I treasured my years of service on that court,” Stein said. “For me it was certainly the pinnacle of my legal career. As a young law student in the 1950s, the New Jersey Supreme Court was considered the preeminent state Supreme Court in the country. When Kean nominated me in October 1984, it was the most significant event in my life.”

Stein, who authored some 365 opinions, said he noticed even during his tenure on the court that something was lacking.

“My recollection was there wasn’t sufficient amicus participation in some



Left to right: Gary Stein, Michael Stein, CJ Griffin.

Photo by Robert Wallace

of those high-profile cases. New Jersey had a public advocate at the time but not a lot of resources,” Stein said.

He said the law firm’s new center can help fill the gap, particularly in criminal litigation.

“That’s going to enhance the quality of justice in this state. We have very talented lawyers in this state to participate in these cases,” said the elder Stein, who is currently a member of the boards of trustees of the ACLU-NJ and the Education Law Center.

While at Pashman Stein, the Brennan Center for Justice enlisted him to file an amicus brief in the *Citizens United* appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. And he assumed a leadership role in the New Jersey State Bar Association’s efforts to set standards for judicial tenure reappointments.

The younger Stein recalled sitting at the dinner table as a young boy and his father talking about the cases he was working on as a lawyer, and how important it was to be part of the important public issues of the day.

“He lived his life in accordance with that code,” Michael Stein said. “He instilled in me what a noble profession law is. Thirty years later, I continue

to believe it’s not just a business, but a profession where we should give back.”

Stein, now 86, formed a coalition that last year filed a lawsuit seeking a court order finding extreme segregation in New Jersey’s public school system unconstitutional: *Latino Action Network v. New Jersey*. Plaintiffs’ motion for partial summary judgment is currently pending in that case, according to the lawyers.

Suzette Parmley is the Trenton Correspondent who covers the N.J. Supreme Court, N.J. Legislature and Business of Law. She joined New Jersey Law Journal this year after a decade and a half at The Philadelphia Inquirer where she was the Atlantic City Gaming Writer, Trenton Statehouse Correspondent, and Retail Columnist/Reporter. Suzette is a five-time winner of the Business Financial Writing Portfolio Award given out annually by the New Jersey Press Association. She is a graduate of the Fels Center of Government at the University of Pennsylvania. Email: Sparmley@alm.com or follow her on Twitter: @SuzParmley