

Some lawyers gravitate toward high-profile cases of unpopular figures

America's Most Unwanted



Al Lindsay Jr., at his office in Butler, has represented a number of high-profile cases.

Criminal defense lawyers already have a challenging job, considering the role they play in people's lives.

But what is that work like when there is a high-profile case, especially one with public opinion staunchly against their client?

Why do some lawyers gravitate toward those types of cases? What kind of mentality does it take to do that work? And why do some take on cases many people believe to be lost causes?

"I believe that if we're going to contribute anything to society as lawyers ... then I think lawyers should fight fear-

lessly for their clients, and if the public doesn't understand that or is against you, it doesn't matter," Al Lindsay Jr., a Butler attorney, said.

Lindsay has represented defendants in a number of high-profile cases during his more than 40 years in practice.

Last year, he took up the appeal process for Jerry Sandusky, the former Penn State University assistant football coach who was convicted in 2012 of sexually abusing young boys.

In May, Lindsay filed a Post Conviction Relief Act petition on behalf of Sandusky.

The petition is a last

resort for defendants to claim they had ineffective counsel during their trial, present newly discovered evidence or raise constitutional law issues.

Sandusky is primarily claiming ineffective counsel and constitutional law issues.

If the petition is successful, Sandusky would have a new trial. A decision is expected by summer's end.

Lindsay said he took the case because he believes Sandusky is innocent and because he feels the case was handled unjustly.

Lindsay said a case such as Sandusky's often

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carries a much different public perception than what is actually occurring in court.

He said people must look for consistency throughout all records and testimony, and attorneys must ignore public perception.

"I often say that what we're searching for is the reality of what really happened," he said.

"You get different versions of what occurred in any specific instance."

He said people who rely on the courts or media reports often don't get all the details of the trial or hear the nuances of testimony.

"People get one version in their mind of what occurred, and then there's what really occurred in the courtroom," he said.

Lindsay said the adversarial nature of the court system allows for

“**The hardest people to defend are people who are absolutely innocent of their charges.**

— Al Lindsay Jr., a Butler attorney

attorneys to fight for their client.

"Any witness looks credible if not properly cross-examined," he said.

In the end, the jury has to weigh actual evidence and testimony to decide beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant is guilty.

"The hardest people to defend are people who are absolutely innocent of their charges," Lindsay said.

"The reason that is is

because we are trained and brought up in a country to believe if you are innocent, then the system will work for you," he said.

"The system works for people who have effective lawyers.

"The system is a dispute resolution system; it is not a justice-delivery system.

"It's a very good system, but the system only works when the people in the system do the job they're supposed to do," he said. ♦

COLLABORATIVE LAW

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not many attorneys are trained in it, he said.

Criss went on to complete collaborative training through the Collaborative Law Association of Southwestern Pennsylvania, and this is the first year he no longer does litigation.

"It's difficult to give up because it makes you money," he said.

"Some of us can do that. We're in a stage of our careers and lives where we don't have to count the costs and the money isn't as important as what we want to do.

"Everybody knows how to fight. They're trained how to fight. They're trained how to argue," he said. "But they're not trained to make peace, which is what we do."

Joseph Kecskemethy of Jaffe & Kecskemethy in Butler has practiced in the areas of family and criminal law for about 25 years, and he added collaborative law to his skill set a couple years ago.

He said he decided to get trained in the collaborative approach after talking about it with some other attorneys who had found it to be productive in some cases.

He said after 25 years of litigation, he likes having another option to resolve conflicts.

He explained because litigation is confrontational in nature, it's naturally bad at resolving disputes.

He added litigation is especially tough on families dealing with divorce

and child custody.

He said he has found collaborative law to be beneficial.

However, he said the approach is not for everyone. For a couple going through a divorce, he said emotions tend to be raw, and if they have been fighting for years, then they aren't ready to come to a mutual agreement.

Wesley Hamilton, a Zelienople attorney who has been in general practice for more than 40 years, said he has settled many cases through litigation and can see where collaborative law could be useful.

But he said he prefers to maintain the traditional approach of fighting for his client's best outcome.

"The client makes the bullets, and I fire them," he said. ♦

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