

FEDERAL COURT PRACTICE COMMITTEE WEBINAR SERIES FOCUSES ON CIVIL RIGHTS

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To U.S. District Judge Raag Singhal, civil rights cases reflect the essence of lawyering, and American democracy.

“These are the types of cases that breathe meaning and purpose into the

Constitution,” he said.

The thought inspired the Federal Court Practice Committee to create “Litigating Civil Rights Cases,” a **free CLE webinar series** featuring panels of U.S. district judges — including Judge Singhal — federal magistrates, Florida circuit judges, veteran practitioners, and prominent civil rights advocates.

Too often, Judge Singhal said, the public is tempted to view civil rights claims with disdain.

“These particular cases are typically involving individuals who are somewhat forgotten, or many in our society consider somewhat less important,” he said. “We always have to strive to make sure that each individual, whether they are the least likeable, or the most needy, are afforded due process, and I think that is really what this series is all about.”

Assistant Attorney General Barbara Junge, a former chair of the Federal Court Practice Committee, agrees.

“It’s a real calling to do this kind of work,” she said. “We wanted to inspire more lawyers to get involved in civil rights cases.”

Federal Court Practice Committee Chair Melissa Visconti and other committee members created the series following a brainstorming session with committee members and federal jurists from the Southern District, Junge said.

It started as a single session and kept growing, she said.

“We figured out that the majority of the civil rights cases, at least in the Southern District of Florida, were these Eighth Amendment claims brought by state inmates,” Junge said. “So, we started with that, but as we kept talking about it, we realized that there were so many other cases that we could talk about, so we just kept fine tuning.”

The first three sessions were live streamed between October 28, 2020, and February 3, 2021, and are available on the committee website:

www.floridabar.org/directories/courts/fed-corner/federal-corner-cle/. To register for the fourth in the series, **click this link**.

Part Four, “Claims Against Federal Agencies and Officials,” is scheduled for March 24. It will feature the following panelists: U.S. District Judge Beth Bloom; U.S. Magistrate Judge Lisette Reid; Kevin Gregg of Kurzban, Kurzban Tetzeli and Pratt; Assistant U.S. Attorney Marlene Rodriguez; Michael Pasano of Carlton Fields, and Daniel Tilley, legal director of ACLU of Florida.

The details are still being worked out, but immigrant rights will likely be part of the discussion, Junge said.

The format begins with a presentation by a federal judge and includes discussions from practitioners on both sides of civil rights cases. Tips about trial strategy, settlements, and mediation are also offered, she said.

“Private companies do CLEs on this topic that last long days,” Junge said. “But we wanted to capture people over a long lunch hour, particularly because we’re trying to inspire new lawyers to get involved in this area.”

Judge Singhal said the webinars are designed to appeal to a broad audience.

“Anyone who is a stakeholder in this type of litigation, whether it’s a private lawyer, a prosecutor, a judge, magistrate, law clerk, law student looking to do this type of work, the family member of a litigant,” he said.



Junge said the Federal Court Practice Committee could not have produced such an ambitious undertaking without the help of co-sponsors: The Government Lawyers Section, the Federal Bar Association's Southern District local chapters (Broward County, Palm Beach County and South Florida); the Cuban American Bar Association; the Miami-Dade Chapter of the Florida Association for Women Lawyers; and the Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr., Bar Association.

The first three parts are:

Part One: "State Inmate Claims Under the 8th Amendment." Panelists included Judge Singhal, U.S. Magistrate Judge William Matthewman, U.S. Magistrate Judge Lisette Reid, Florida Attorney General Bureau Chief John Bajger, and Gary Pappas and Naomi Berry, both attorneys with Carlton Fields. It was live streamed October 28, 2020.

Part Two: "Claims Brought Under the Bill of Rights Against Municipal, County and State Defendants," on December 9, 2020. Panelists included: U.S. District Judge Donald Middlebrooks, U.S. Magistrate Judge Patrick Hunt, Judge Reid, Bajger, Ashley Drumm of Carlton Fields, Anne Flannigan of Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman, Ray Taseff of the Florida Justice Institute, and Assistant Miami-Dade County Attorney Erica Zaron.

Part Three: "Due Process and State Law Claims in State or Federal Court," aired February 3. Panelists included U.S. District Judge Rodolfo Ruiz, 11th Judicial Circuit Judge Miguel de la O, Drumm, Bajger, Flannigan, Daniel Tilley, legal director of ACLU Florida, and Zaron.

