

# Bullish on the Bar

## New SBM President Aims to Increase Engagement, Access to Justice

By Lynn Patrick Ingram



After she wrapped up an oral argument in trial practice class during law school, Jennifer Grieco's professor nicknamed her "Bulldog" for her tenacity and zeal.

Quite appropriate.

Whether that's just who she was or whether it was a self-fulfilling prophecy, the result is the same: an advocate for social justice who never loses sight of the big picture and does not quit.

Now she brings that passion and drive to the State Bar of Michigan and its 45,000-plus members as the organization's 84th president.

Grieco says she's simply "taking the baton" and running with it, but her friends, family, and colleagues say Bar members can expect much more.

"The members of the State Bar can expect that Jennifer will care as much about them (and their clients) as she does about her own clients and family," said friend and colleague Mike Sullivan. "My observations tell me that she truly wants the practice of law—and lawyers—to be a force for good in the world. And she is not afraid to think big."

Close friend Leigh Moss, who recruited Grieco to the Women's Bar Association of Oakland County, agreed, noting that Grieco never simply goes with the flow. Rather, she always looks for ways to make things better, but not just for the sake of change.

"She is a woman of action," Moss said. "She makes things happen, she's a great leader, and people are drawn to her. You can always count on her to follow through, do a great job, and make whatever she's doing the best it can be."

Moss also commented on Grieco's selflessness.

"Jennifer looks for ways to bring people along with her—to raise them up," she said. "She elevates people. And she's been particularly supportive of women. She's always doing things to help support women and their practices."

Grieco's father, retired U.S. Army Colonel Ralph Grieco, said she's always been that way, and he's not at all surprised with her success.

"It was obvious to us at an early age that Jennifer may have a calling to law because she could argue with us on most any topic," he said.

And they were right.

### Army brat

Grieco calls herself an Army brat. She comes from a long line of military leaders and essentially grew up in the Army.

Her grandfather retired from the military after serving in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army. Both of his sons went into the Army; Grieco's uncle retired as a lieutenant colonel and her father retired as a colonel after 26 years.

Her brother also went into the military—first the U.S. Navy and then the Illinois National Guard, where, tragically, he was killed in action by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan in October 2008.



Jennifer with her brother, Kevin; mother, Linda; and father, Col. Ralph Grieco

“He was such a great guy,” she said. “I am so very proud of my family’s military service and sacrifice.”

Needless to say, growing up in a family that serves and sacrifices and being the sister of a hero who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country helps one form deep beliefs and powerful virtues.

“Growing up in the military certainly gives you a strong sense of service and patriotism,” Grieco said. “I attended many change of command ceremonies at Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri)—including when my father took over as battalion commander—and recall sitting in the stands of the parade field and the enormous sense of pride in our military and our country. And then when the national anthem would play with the soldiers in the background, you couldn’t help but get goose bumps, and I was always close to tears.

“It was very emotional and made a powerful impact on me as a kid—[it’s] probably why so many sons and daughters of the military follow in the tradition.”

Because of her father’s service, Grieco moved around quite a bit as a child. She was born in Frankfurt, Germany, and went to a Department of Defense high school in Heidelberg. In between the tours in Germany, she lived in a variety of places, including bases in Kansas, Missouri, and Virginia and an off-base stay just outside of Washington, D.C.

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—*Hon. Maureen McGinnis*

This experience, her father says, helped her develop the traits that have made her a great lawyer.

“By observation and exposure to 18 years as an Army brat and living in many U.S. states and abroad, she began to develop the traits of integrity, honesty, patriotism, leadership, dedication, acceptance of others, and the ability to adapt to different situations and cultures,” he said.

She eventually ended up in Toledo, which was always home base to her family. She earned her undergraduate and law degrees at the University of Toledo, which is where she also met her husband, Chad.

That’s also where the “Bulldog” found her calling.

### “Uniquely multidimensional”

Despite her reputation as a fearless and supremely talented litigator, Grieco is equally revered for the example she sets as a wife and mother.

“There are two very distinct sides to Jennifer,” said law partner Ken Neuman. “As an attorney, she is an extremely serious, hardworking, and zealous advocate for her clients and in service to the Bar. On the personal side, Jennifer has a tremendous zest for life, is an awesome mom to her daughter, Meadow, and is usually the life of the party in social settings.”

Sullivan agreed.

“She is equal parts badass litigator, caring mother, and lawyer dedicated to the best ideals of the profession,” he said, noting that everything she did early in her career foretold greatness.

“Such predictions turned out to be precisely true, as she has grown into everything you would want in a lawyer,” he said. “But even more than her effectiveness as a litigator, she truly cares about the profession and the people that it serves.”

“[Jennifer] is so uniquely multidimensional that you cannot help but wonder how one person can do so many things, do them well, and mean so much to so many people, said Grieco’s friend and fellow SBM commissioner Hon. Maureen McGinnis.

“Jennifer cares deeply about many people and is a true friend and supporter to so many in her family and social circle,” McGinnis added. “She is a dedicated mother and wife, always striving to be a strong role model for her amazing daughter. She is passionate about many social issues and does not hesitate to educate people on her positions while still being open-minded to any opposing viewpoints. To see her in any setting, her enthusiasm for life, compassion for others, and desire for inclusion never cease to amaze me.”

### Grieco in Action

**Education:** University of Toledo (BA); University of Toledo College of Law (cum laude)

**Firm/Practice Areas:** Neuman Anderson Grieco McKenney, PC, in Birmingham; complex commercial litigation with a particular emphasis on business tort claims, including professional malpractice, contract actions, coverage claims, shareholder/member disputes, and construction litigation

**Association/Volunteer Service:** State Bar of Michigan (current president, former Board of Commissioners member, and Negligence Law Section council member [including treasurer and secretary]); Oakland County Bar Association (past president); Oakland County Bar Foundation (former trustee and Fellow); Oakland Livingston Legal Aid (former trustee); Women’s Bar Association of Oakland County (past president); Michigan Trial Lawyers Association (former board member); American Bar Association; Lakeshore Legal Aid Board of Directors

**Family:** Jennifer and her husband, Chad Burch, have one daughter, Meadow

**Hobbies:** Camping, books, music, yoga



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—*State Bar President Jennifer Grieco*

Jennifer with her husband, Chad, and daughter, Meadow

## Service oriented

Grieco truly hit the ground running after law school, finding a job with Sommers Schwartz and immediately giving back to the profession and the community.

At an Oakland County Women’s Lawyers Association event, she met Moss, who asked her to join the leadership team. She didn’t hesitate to accept the offer, and within just a few years she was president—one of the youngest in the organization’s history.

She later became president of the Oakland County Bar Association, where she spearheaded the creation of the OCBA Pro Bono Mentor Match program in conjunction with local legal aid providers. The program matches new lawyers with mentors willing to help them through a pro bono case.

“I believe that case-specific mentoring is a great way to train our next generation of lawyers and provide much needed access to justice,” Grieco said. “The legal aid providers, who have more cases than they can handle, agreed to identify appropriate (less complex) pro bono cases that OCBA can assign to a new attorney and match the new attorney with an experienced attorney who provides practical experience and support on the pro bono case.”

The program has been a resounding success. Grieco and the program have received multiple honors, including the OCBA Pro Bono Service Award, the LexisNexis Community Education Outreach Award, and the State Bar of Michigan Kimberly M. Cahill Award for Bar leadership.

Now she brings her creativity, passion, and determination to the State Bar presidency, and her colleagues are rightfully excited.

## A difference maker

Grieco’s colleagues agreed that she will not only work hard *for* Bar members, but will work hard *with* them.

“She wants members to get involved. She wants to bring them with her so they too can be successful,” Moss said. “Jennifer helps people and she gets things done.”

Sullivan said Grieco “is someone who can not only come up with a great idea, but can marshal the assets to deliver the outcome.”

McGinnis agreed, noting Grieco is a difference maker who knows when to act and when to leave things alone.

“She is a visionary, but not someone who will make change just for the sake of making change,” McGinnis said. “Jennifer is cognizant of the time-honored traditions of the profession and will remain true to our core values as attorneys when it is in the best interest of those we help.”

Meanwhile, Grieco says she intends to use her platform to encourage lawyers to increase their engagement with the State Bar, especially younger lawyers, and increase collaboration with local and affinity bars. She also plans to continue to help her colleagues find ways to promote greater access to justice.

“I hope that during my tenure, I can further encourage collaboration with local and

affinity bars to work together to make a bigger impact on the profession and the public for our members,” Grieco said. “Our members are their members, their members are our members, and it seems that there are opportunities to work together to be able to more effectively and efficiently provide services.”

As for increasing access to justice, Grieco noted “we have lawyers who are willing and able to do the work, whether it’s on a limited scope, or for a reduced fee, or pro bono, and we have people in need of services; we just need to match the two for the benefit of the public and our Bar members.

“What the State Bar endeavors to accomplish with its Strategic Plan should be of significant importance to all members of our profession, and I’d like to do more to simply educate our members of this important work,” she added. “I know that there is an opportunity to better educate our members and the public of the work of the SBM.”

Grieco said she will do everything in her power to continue the work of the State Bar staff and the many volunteers who have given so much to the legal community.

“I will work hard to push this message and do what I can in my role to move the profession forward,” she said. “I am a first-generation lawyer, but I care deeply about the future of the profession and our legacy.” ■

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