

# DAILY REPORT

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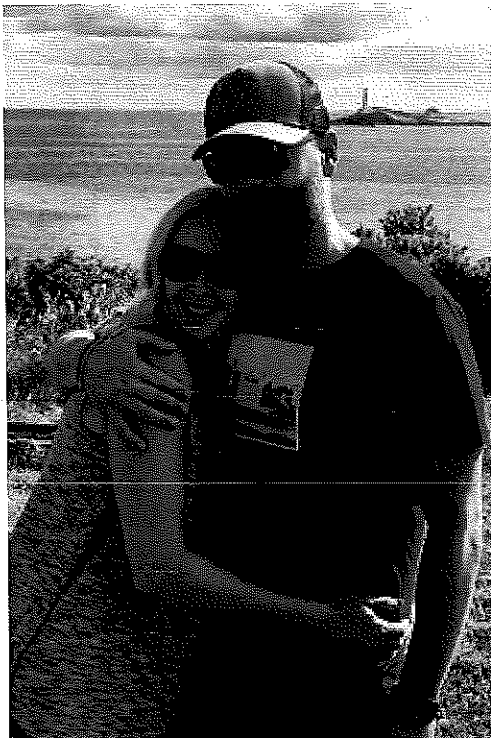
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## As Attorney Suicides Mount, a Survivor Speaks Out

While some law firms are taking steps to address depression and other mental health problems, lawyers are still more likely to kill themselves than workers in most other professions.

By Meghan Tribe | November 12, 2018



**Gabriel**

**MacConaill and Joanna Litt pictured recreating their engagement photo.**

Joanna Litt and her husband Gabriel MacConaill would be celebrating their 10th wedding anniversary on Wednesday.

Instead, in a personal essay published Monday morning, [Litt described](https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2018/11/12/big-law-killed-my-husband-an-open-letter-from-a-sidley-partners-widow/) (<https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2018/11/12/big-law-killed-my-husband-an-open-letter-from-a-sidley-partners-widow/>) how she is still grieving this week—and searching for answers—a month after MacConaill took his own life on a Sunday afternoon in the parking garage of Sidley Austin's Los Angeles offices.

"His father said that he was one of the last people that he thought would ever do this, and I think we all felt that way," Litt said of her husband, who was a partner in Sidley's restructuring practice.

"I wish I had read somebody else's story, just so I could have maybe pushed a little harder when it came to figuring out how he was doing, and maybe not have given him as much space as I think I did, thinking that he could work it out on his own," she said.

In her essay, Litt wrote that MacConaill labored under increasing anguish about his work and health in the final weeks of his life, when his responsibilities included a major bankruptcy assignment. At one point, she wrote, he told her a visit to the hospital for exhaustion could spell the end of his career.

"We have seen Joanna's letter in *The American Lawyer*. Her heartbreak is palpable and her words have moved us all," a Sidley spokesperson said. "We have nothing but the utmost sympathy and compassion for the family as they grieve the incredibly tragic loss of Gabe. This is a painful reminder of the need to raise awareness and continue providing programs and services to help all lawyers and staff in addressing mental health issues."

*Read More: ['Big Law Killed My Husband': An Open Letter From a Sidley Partner's Widow](https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2018/11/12/big-law-killed-my-husband-an-open-letter-from-a-sidley-partners-widow/)*  
*(<https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2018/11/12/big-law-killed-my-husband-an-open-letter-from-a-sidley-partners-widow/>)*

Lawyers have among the highest rates of suicide across all U.S. occupations. A 2016 study conducted by the American Bar Association's Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation [found \(https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/almID/1202748847326/\)](https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/almID/1202748847326/) that 28 percent of lawyers struggle with depression, compared with less than 8 percent for the general population, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In a 2012 analysis, the CDC said that the legal industry had the 11th-highest incidence of suicide among professions, with 18.8 people out of 100,000 taking their lives, compared to 16.1 nationally.

In addition to MacConaill, several lawyers associated with large firms have added to those statistics in recent months and years.

Examples include 54-year-old DLA Piper partner Bruce Wickersham, whose body was found (<https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2018/09/21/suicide-blamed-in-death-of-dla-piper-partner/>) submerged at a Massachusetts marina in September. A police homicide report said Wickersham left details related to his final wishes in the cabin of his boat nearby.

After years of struggling with depression, high-profile South Florida litigator Ervin Gonzalez took his own life ([https://www.law.com/dailybusinessreview/almID/1202789231340/Noted-South-Florida-Litigator-Ervin-Gonzalez-Dies-at-57/?cmp=share\\_twitter](https://www.law.com/dailybusinessreview/almID/1202789231340/Noted-South-Florida-Litigator-Ervin-Gonzalez-Dies-at-57/?cmp=share_twitter)) last year at his home in Coral Gables. Prominent Texas trial lawyer and Democratic donor Steven Mostyn died last November (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/18/obituaries/steve-mostyn-texas-democratic-fund-raiser-dies-at-46.html>) in what his wife called a “sudden onset and battle with a mental health issue.” Also last year, a lawsuit went to trial in Chicago (<https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/almID/1202781576400/>) over what led Stewart Dolin, a 57-year-old former co-chair of Reed Smith’s corporate and securities practice, to throw himself in front of an “L” train years earlier.

Patrick Krill, an expert on attorney mental health issues, said there are likely many, many examples that are never reported.

“The dimensions of the profession’s suicide problem are harder to measure, since it is common for causes of death to remain private or otherwise be shielded from disclosure,” Krill said. “Anecdotally, I hear of far more attorney suicides than make it into the press, and I believe the problem is more widespread than many would guess.”

The legal profession as a whole has a significant and underappreciated problem with mental health, including depression, Krill believes. And while suicide may be the ultimate risk, there are other significant consequences of untreated depression that can greatly diminish a person’s quality of life and work performance, he added.

A recent survey on Mental Health and Substance Abuse (<https://www.law.com/2018/09/14/alm-survey-on-mental-health-and-substance-abuse-big-laws-pervasive-problem/>) by ALM Intelligence found that more than 86 percent of law firm leaders said that depression

occurred in their firms. Over 93 percent said the same for anxiety.

But that survey only included the responses of 30 law firms from the Am Law 200, while 85 percent of the group declined to share their views on behavioral health issues in law firms.

In September the ABA [launched a new pledge campaign \(https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2018/09/10/aba-sounds-new-alarm-on-substance-abuse-and-law-firms-pledge-action/\)](https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2018/09/10/aba-sounds-new-alarm-on-substance-abuse-and-law-firms-pledge-action/), urging law firms to adopt a new framework developed by Krill to combat mental health and substance abuse issues in the profession.

“Some firms are truly engaged with the subject of attorney well-being,” Krill said. “Others are avoiding or resisting it, and some recognize the problems but don’t know where to begin to solve them.”

For Litt, her husband’s suicide sparked determination to help others avoid a similar experience.

“I don’t know how to honor him, and I think this might be the best way,” Litt said of her decision to share her story.

“I don’t want there to be shame surrounded by these types of acts, and I think it’s just not talked about nearly enough,” she said.

*Free, confidential services are available 24/7 for people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress and for those around them. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). A crisis text line is at 741-741.*

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