

## **INSPIRED TO SERVE: MENTAL HEALTH AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM**

### **Section 1: Career Journey and Advocacy**

My growing fascination with inmate mental health and criminal defense work led Chris Boals to put me in touch with Holly Giezl, a licensed attorney in Phoenix, Arizona, who received her Juris Doctor (JD) law degree from the Arizona State University College of Law in 1991. Holly explained that her practice has evolved since the beginning of her career, when she served as a legal assistant for two local judges. She began practicing medical, insurance, and aviation law at a medium-sized firm before moving to a larger firm to focus broadly on healthcare-related cases.

Holly's work on a string of white collar fraud cases in the 1990s inspired her to pivot towards criminal defense work, including civil rights law. This led her to focus on incarcerated populations in jails and prisons, handling gang violence, corruption, inmate violence, and conditions of confinement cases. She's worked extensively on addressing assault prevention strategies and the lack of precautions taken in correctional facilities that could limit injustices.

Holly focuses primarily on criminal defense cases with an underlying mental illness component that affects the perpetrator and influences the criminal act. The prevalence of these cases has skyrocketed in recent years due to a lack of available resources, services, and staffing support at facilities that help treat mental illness. Holly does pro bono, free-of-charge, work at the Arizona state hospital's forensic section. This hospital is located in the 4th to 5th-largest city in the country, Phoenix, Arizona, yet it only has 150 beds reserved for patients deemed guilty but insane (GBI). This sentence essentially means that though guilty of a crime, the individual was unable to differentiate between right and wrong during the commission because of severe mental illness.

Holly explained that highly paranoid individuals may hurt a loved one coming home because they're convinced it's an intruder intending to hurt them. An individual experiencing hallucinations through psychosis may believe they're fighting dragons or demons when in reality they're hurting an innocent person. Drug-induced hallucinations cannot result in a GBI charge, meaning it's important to know the client's history before exploring potential legal avenues. A client who has a history of mental illness and no history of substance abuse is more likely to receive this verdict than an individual with a history of substance abuse and no history of mental illness. Additionally, Holly emphasized the importance of having a psychiatric expert present when evaluating a client's mental state to prevent malingering, the faking of a mental

illness to receive a lighter sentence. Holly advised that, to offer effective legal representation, it's important to understand the individual needs and mental conditions of the client.

Holly went on to co-found the Association for the Chronically Mentally Ill (ACMI) in 2018, a non-profit organization that strives to improve care for chronically mentally ill populations by enhancing cost-effective networks. They primarily focus on psychosis inducing illnesses like bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Many of the founders and individuals who helped move the non-profit forward, including an Arizona State representative, have strong familial connections or experiences with someone struggling with severe mental illness. Holly attributes the non-profit's success to the various strengths team members bring to the table. There are two lawyers, an engineer, a retired judge, two doctors, a dietician, and a banker who help keep the ball rolling. Since 2018, ACMI has passed 30 pieces of legislation into law that support mentally ill populations. Monthly meetings are held that include an hour lecture and an hour of sharing time for families and loved ones impacted by chronic mental illness.