

San Francisco divorce attorney on a mission to give back

By Lori Rose

Monica, is a high net-worth divorce attorney serving the San Francisco and Silicon Valley elite for over twenty years. She heads the family law practice at the Buchalter law firm. In a society focused on individual success, Monica is determined to give back. "To me being successful is not only about my own personal accolades, but about contributing to my community."

Monica has always included pro bono work as part of her legal practice. In 2008, 2011, and 2015 she received the "Outstanding Volunteer Award for Public Service" from the Justice and Diversity Center of the San Francisco Bar Association.

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Most recently she serves on the Board of Pierce's Pledge a San Francisco non-profit organization. Monica was deeply affected by Pierce's death in 2021. When a lively 9-year-old named Pierce was shot by his father in a murder-suicide amid a custody dispute in San Francisco, the

tragedy spurred Monica, a friend of the boy's mother, to think about ways to keep kids safer.

"It was so impactful," said Monica, "It really made me think — wow, in all the years I've been practicing, I've never asked my clients if they have a gun or if they have a gun in their home. I just decided that if I'm going to take on a client, I'm going to make it a condition of working with me, period."

Monica's personal commitment became the impetus behind Pierce's Pledge, a nonprofit founded by Pierce's mother, Lesley Hu, that asks family law attorneys to require clients to declare and temporarily store weapons out of the home so that they are less accessible during potentially volatile divorce and custody proceedings.

"So full of life"

Pierce was one of more than 900 children murdered by a parent during a high-conflict divorce or custody case in the United States since 2008, according to the nonprofit Center for Judicial Excellence, which pushes for child-centered policy reforms in the family court system.

"Pierce was the kind of kid that not only other children wanted to be around, but adults too," Monica said. "He was extremely smart, funny, vivacious and full of life."

She hopes Pierce's Pledge will help prevent future violence and deaths by



empowering family law attorneys to question their clients about firearms and by educating those working in the family court system about the risks they pose.

Recently, the organization created a national database of secure gun storage facilities, which had never been done before. It is featured on the Pierce's Pledge website: www.piercespledge.org.

The Pledge

Here is Pierce's Pledge:

• I pledge to do my part in keeping children as safe as possible during family law matters. For the best interest of the child,

I pledge to provide information about firearm risks to clients and communication.

- I also pledge to expect my clients to declare weapons and guns they may have in their possession and that they store them in a secure off-site location with a third-party or otherwise separate themselves from those firearms during the case, or as may be required under state or federal law.
- In an effort to reduce risk of harm to my client and others, I pledge that I will take ethically permissible steps to address a client or potential client's refusal to declare and/or store their firearms.

To contact Monica Mazzei, go to: www.buchalter.com/attorneys/monica-mazzei/#bio