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PLDW Trust and Estate Attorneys' Major Victory for its Client, Americans United For Life, Establishes Ground Breaking Precedent in Rhode Island

Providence, RI – January 11, 2017 – Rhode Island Superior Court's Associate Justice Michael A. Silverstein on January 4, 2017, ruled in favor of Pannone Lopes Devereaux & West LLC ([PLDW](http://pldw.com)) Attorneys Bernard A. Jackvony and Rebecca M. Murphy, and their client, Americans United for Life (AUL), in his ground breaking decision that recognized – for the first time in Rhode Island's history – the independent tort of “tortious interference with an expected inheritance.”

Judge Silverstein's decision was in response to a motion to dismiss the lawsuit filed by AUL against the Legion of Christ (Legion), claiming that Father Marcial Maciel Delgollado (Fr. Maciel), the founder and head of the Legion, and other Legion officials, systematically preyed upon the religiousness of Mrs. Gabrielle Mee, a devout Catholic and wealthy widow, and manipulated her into naming the Legion the sole beneficiary of her estate, removing AUL from a prior will. Mrs. Mee's estate was worth approximately \$60 million. In the complaint, AUL claimed that if the Legion had not insulated Mrs. Mee from the truth about Fr. Maciel's scandalous life of sexual abuse of teenaged seminarians, drug abuse and fathering children, she never would have named the Legion a beneficiary.

In its suit, AUL alleged, among other causes of action, that the Legion had tortiously interfered with AUL's bequest of 10 percent of the estate of Mrs. Mee. The Legion argued that “tortious interference with an expected inheritance” did not exist in Rhode Island and if it did, AUL was required to pursue remedies in Probate Court and had not done so.

In his precedent setting ruling, Judge Silverstein denied the Legion's motion to dismiss, allowing AUL's lawsuit to proceed in Superior Court, holding that tortious interference with expectation of inheritance “is merely a natural extension of Rhode Island law with respect to tortious interference with actual and prospective contractual relations” and that AUL had sufficiently demonstrated that it had pursued remedies in Probate Court.

“This is a landmark decision in Rhode Island and can be used in similar situations where vulnerable people have been exploited. The ruling opens up another remedy in situations where there is elderly abuse,” said Attorney Jackvony. “We are very pleased with this victory for our client.”

“Mrs. Mee was a long-time supporter of Americans United for Life and was deeply committed to the pro-life mission of protecting women and unborn children from the harms of abortion. We greatly appreciated her generosity to help us advance our shared vision,” said Clarke Forsythe, AUL Acting President and Senior Counsel. “We commend PLDW attorneys for their work on behalf of AUL and the possibility that Mrs. Mee’s wishes will be honored and respected.”

Attorney Murphy notes that the decision aligns Rhode Island with approximately half of the United States that have extended the common law claim of tortious interference with a contract to situations in which a tortfeasor wrongfully interferes with expected inheritance, benefit under a will, at-death benefit, or inter vivos gift – a gift made during a person’s lifetime.

To access Judge Silverstein’s decision, click [here](#).

For more information about this case or other estate and trust matters, please contact attorneys Jackvony and Murphy at 401-824-5100 or email bjackvony@pldw.com or rmurphy@pldw.com. For information about PLDW, visit www.pldw.com and follow us on LinkedIn, Twitter (and Facebook).

About Pannone Lopes Devereaux & West LLC

The attorneys and staff at Pannone Lopes Devereaux & West LLC (PLDW) are committed to delivering cost-effective solutions for their clients as well as supporting the community in a meaningful way. Many of the lawyers at PLDW were formerly members of international law firms and are trained in multiple disciplines including the areas of corporate and business law, special masterships, government relations and legislative strategies, municipal infrastructure, civil litigation, real estate development and commercial lending, nonprofit law, health care, white collar defense, estate planning, probate and trust litigation. The core values of integrity, quality services and responsiveness are stressed each day at PLDW. For more information, visit www.pldw.com.