



GPM July Pro Bono Spotlight

July 29, 2016

GPM attorney Erin Westbrook recently had her first argument before the Minnesota Court of Appeals, advocating on behalf of a Hennepin County foster-care provider who wanted to take permanent legal custody of three of her grandchildren, who were in the custody of Wright County, instead of having them placed for adoption.

M.B.'s request to take custody of her grandchildren (after their parents' rights were terminated) was supported by multiple Hennepin County child services workers, who testified that M.B. was a capable foster-parent and would be an excellent custodian for her grandchildren. The Wright County District Court rejected this testimony as irrelevant and relied upon the testimony of a Wright County social worker who testified vaguely that M.B. would not be a suitable custodian. Erin represented M.B. in her appeal, arguing that the district court made a number of erroneous findings unsupported by the record and had no basis to discount the Hennepin County workers' testimony. Although M.B. has a difficult standard to meet in overturning the district court's decision that it is in the best interests of the children to be placed for adoption, the Court of Appeals was receptive to Erin's arguments, and Erin and M.B. are hoping for a positive decision that would reunite M.B. with her grandchildren.