SL PARTNER PROFILE

by **Bill Donahue**

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Pillar *of* Support



WHETHER SHE'S GUIDING CLIENTS THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES OR ADVOCATING FOR STUDENTS, **SUSAN M. GIBSON** OF **GIBSON FAMILY LAW** STRIVES TO HELP OTHERS MOVE FORWARD.

Susan M. Gibson wanted to be a lawyer since she was a young child. Even then, she loved the idea of being a force for good, someone who could lead people to the other side of their darkest moments.

While she initially envisioned a career as a criminal prosecutor, her desire to advocate for others and uplift her community compelled her to change course. Her studies at Columbus School of Law in Washington, D.C., which included elective classes in family law, put her on a much different path: guiding people through complex legal issues such as divorce, custody, child support, equitable distribution, and spousal support.

"Most people don't have an accurate understanding of how the legal system works, or they're intimidated by it," says Gibson, the founder of Gibson Family Law in Doylestown. "I work very hard to make it simple and streamline the process for clients by breaking it down every step of the way, so they know what to expect."

Divorces can be thorny and protracted affairs, but Gibson strives for a different result. While she prepares for each case as if it will go to trial, she prioritizes a "settlement-minded" approach designed to achieve clients' goals as efficiently, cost-effectively, and painlessly as possible. She also has the future in mind, both in terms of protecting her clients' rights and, when there are children involved, preserving peace within the family.

"One thing I'm always mindful of is that the parties [in a divorce] are parents, and they will continue to be parents with or without me, so my first goal—to borrow from the medical field—is to do no harm," she adds. "I'm not going to interfere in those parenting relationships in a way that makes it worse for them to parent their children. I'm not here to overstep or stir the pot."

Gibson acknowledges that even the most amicable divorces can brew up a storm of complicated memories and emotions. She says the clients who tend to be best served by her services are those who can "create for themselves a level of protection" from the emotional turmoil that can arise.

"Going through divorce is really two different processes," she says. "There's dealing with the emotional loss that comes from the end of a relationship, and there's the legal process of solving the problems of custody schedules and the division of assets. From my view, the best use of their time is to focus on the legal process and help me by giving me the information I need to work toward a solution, and to take care of themselves emotionally when they're not talking to me."

For anyone who finds themselves on the cusp of a making the decision to dissolve a marriage, Gibson has the following advice: "Educate yourself about your financial situation."

"A lot of my clients come in and they don't know what accounts they have or how much is in those accounts because one spouse tends to manage the finances and the other manages other aspects of their life together," she says. "Try to get an understanding of what the financial picture looks like so we can hit the ground running. But getting that information [prior to our first meeting] is not always possible, in which case we figure it out together."

Learning to Lead

Gibson founded Gibson Family Law in June 2021 after more than a decade of honing her craft with reputable law firms in the Philadelphia area. Her firm has grown steadily in the past five years, with a team that includes Christian Zamora, her devoted paralegal, and Brooke Kanig, the firm's legal assistant, intake coordinator, and receptionist. Gibson envisions more growth on the horizon—namely, the addition of an associate attorney to accommodate the firm's mounting caseload.

Gibson sees her work as a form of giving back in that her expertise helps clients solve serious problems and move forward with their lives. That said, her altruism extends to sharing her time and expertise with the people who live—and learn—within the community she serves.

As a mother of four, Gibson has a particular interest in education. In 2023, she was elected to the Central Bucks School District Board of School Directors. As vice president of the board, she helps lead an organization that, under prior leadership, invited controversy over far-reaching book bans and other restrictions on what educators could teach in the classroom.

She sees both responsibilities—serving clients through her firm and serving her community through her work with the school board—as intertwined.

"Being on the school board has dramatically shaped my practice," she says. "I have learned more about trends in our community in terms of what parents are looking for in their children's education, and that often comes up in a custody context. It also helps you have your finger on the pulse of the community.

"Knowing what our community is facing, and what our kids are facing in our schools, gives me a better understanding of what families need," she continues. "I enjoy supporting students, as well as the educators, staff, and administrators who go to work every day to take care of our kids. On some days that feels even more important than the work I do with the firm."

Going forward, Gibson has a simple yet profound goal: to do the most good, both for her clients and for the community as a whole.

"I'm really just looking to provide leadership and good advice," she says. "The firm will grow to the extent that it makes sense for us and to the extent that we can handle the amount of work that needs to be done. Really, my main goal, even as we expand, is just being available for clients, providing high-quality legal services, and being a resource for people when they need us." ■



About Susan M. Gibson

An Atlanta native who grew up in Chicago, Susan M. Gibson earned her Juris Doctor from the Columbus School of Law at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. She served on the school's Council of Professional Conduct for three years, becoming the council chair in her final year. Besides U.S. law, she has a background in psychology. She studied the subject at Loyola University in Chicago, where she received her undergraduate degree, and then at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia, where she earned a master's in forensic psychology.

Tenacity, compassion, and exceptional listening skills have been foundational to Gibson's success as an attorney. She also has a strong interest in helping vulnerable populations, including members of the LGBTQ+ community. She describes herself as a proud member of the National LGBTQ+ Bar and Bucks County Bar Association.

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