

Matilda Robinson-Murphy

CBA Manifesto

Embarking on a career as a criminal barrister should be an exciting prospect; at least it was for me in 2015. The notion of making a difference, travel, working for yourself and having a variety of cases intrigued me. Fast forward ten years to a mass exodus of junior barristers, an overwhelming back log of cases, unworkable listing practices and remaining concerns over fees. The reality of the profession has sunk in for many. Despite the hurdles, I remain optimistic that this can be a career that works around a fulfilling family life, and it is with this focus in mind that I seek your vote for Assistant Secretary of the CBA.

I was on my feet in 2017, with a busy practice spanning essentially the whole country, splitting my time between defence and prosecution briefs. Then in 2021 after the birth of my twins, I went on maternity leave and moved my life to the Midlands. I am lucky enough to have returned to the profession with the support of my chambers and now have a thriving practice as a Grade 3 Prosecutor in the West Midlands. Nevertheless, I understand the emotional, logistical and financial concerns of returning to work after parental leave. Daily it seems there are conversations at the junior bar where people are opting not to have a family simply because they cannot foresee a future where they could manage both. This must change – no one should have to choose between pursuing a career and building a family.

I recognise the primary concerns surrounding well-being and retention at the Criminal Bar, and the relentless work the CBA does to ameliorate the current pressures. I understand the role of Assistant Secretary would incorporate working with other committees, attending regular internal meetings and liaising with government bodies. I have consistently engaged in the training stage of this profession, from reviewing pupillage applications to adjudicating undergraduate debates. I am a collaborative person who works well in a team, having worked domestically in committees at university and within chambers, and abroad in intergovernmental organisations.

I acknowledge there is much work to be done, and having personally experienced the difficulty of rebuilding a sustainable career, I believe I am uniquely positioned to advocate on behalf of the junior bar and contribute to initiatives aimed at improving well-being, particularly for returning parents.

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