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## Justice should be a lawyer's sweet spot

Last week, I was channel surfing and came across the start of a movie I had not seen in years. It was the award-winning moving "Philadelphia."

I have watched my fair share of legal movies. I like legal movies. In fact, I love them. It gives me some insight as to how jurors may be perceiving us and our legal system.

Let's face it, Hollywood does not provide us with a sterling reputation when it comes to accurately depicting lawyers in films. Most are far from realistic. Allow this city boy to explain what separated the wheat from the chaff in the movie "Philadelphia." I thought the movie accurately revealed some underlying truths about how many practice law.

For those who have not seen it, "Philadelphia" involves an attorney dying of AIDS. The plaintiff, a rising attorney at a large corporate law firm, was fired. The firm claimed the firing was appropriate as he was more or less incompetent.

However, the attorney was convinced that the reasons given for his termination were a pretext and that he was fired because he was gay and dying of AIDS.

At first, the discharged lawyer could not find an attorney to take his case. Finally, he gets the reluctant help of a homophobic personal-injury lawyer played by Denzel Washington. Not only did Denzel Washington's character initially not want to accept the case — he did not agree with this potential client's sexual orientation and had several major

### BALANCING LIFE AND THE LAW



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misconceptions about this potential plaintiff's physical condition.

Eventually, Washington's character was able to overcome his own personal misgivings and recognized the importance of finding justice for this man.

When a skilled trial lawyer can set aside personal opinions to focus on the needs of the given client, justice is likely to occur.

Truth be told, you may not always like your client, but never forget his or her cause and the reason we do what we do. Our goal is to obtain justice for that client.

One of my favorite parts of the movie is when Denzel Washington recalls what he loved most about the law: "It's that every now and again — not often, but occasionally — you get to be part of justice being done. That really is quite a thrill when that happens."

That quote epitomizes what our role is in the legal system. From my perspective, the ability to right

a wrong for an injured individual and obtain justice for them when they may be at the lowest point of their life is truly a humbling feeling. Yet, at some point, each of us could relate to what Denzel Washington was experiencing. If not, why continue to practice law?

Still, on a larger scale, "Philadelphia," like other legal movies, explored issues that our society often encounters. Unknown or misinformed social justice issues are often flushed out in our courtrooms.

For example, civil rights issues were debated in courtrooms in the 1960s. The social justice issue of AIDS-based discrimination came to light in courtrooms in the 1980s. In the 1980s, the AIDS epidemic was catastrophic, mysterious and downright scary.

Doctors and experts did not fully understand these conditions, let alone laypeople. Lawyers brought these issues to the forefront and sought answers to tough questions facing our society.

When Elizabeth A. Kaveny and I were in talks about forming the law firm of Kaveny + Kroll LLC, many of the feel-good moments in the movie resurfaced when we began discussing the impact we can continue to make on people's lives.

Race, religion, blue collar vs. white collar — none of that matters when you are trying to do the right thing for someone who is at one of their worst points in their lives.

I am so very excited about our new firm. We, as trial lawyers, must seek the truth. It is always a battle. It will be done. After all, it is what we do.