

Penn Law grad tackles issues of 'trust and betrayal'

Ponvert focuses on injury and wrongful death cases

By [Zahra Husain](#) · June 30, 2014

One Penn Law graduate wants to help the victims pursue their bullies.

Antonio Ponvert III — a 1990 Penn Law graduate — is making huge strides in the courtroom. Though he started out as a civil rights lawyer, Ponvert shifted his focus to complex and high value injury and wrongful death cases about ten years ago.

In this position, Ponvert only represents plaintiffs, individuals who have been hurt in some way, so he does not represent any corporations or governmental bodies.

Ponvert said a common theme among his cases is “representing people who have been victimized in some way by someone who was in in a position of power over them.”

To date, his most high profile case is that of Cara Munn. At fourteen, she traveled with her boarding school to China, where the group entered a forested area as part of an excursion. In the forest, a tick bit Munn, who contracted encephalitis and permanently lost her ability to speak. After suing the school for negligence, Ponvert won his client \$41.75 million.

Ponvert said that the case's national impact made it special.

“[The verdict] had a really positive effect all over the nation because it caused organizations to be much more careful in how they take minors on trips to foreign countries,” Ponvert said.

After the Munn case, Ponvert recalled getting many phone calls from schools and camps sharing that they had instituted stricter protocols to investigate potential dangers and work towards providing the most possible protection for their students or campers when traveling abroad.

Ponvert credits authenticity in his clients and their stories for his courtroom success. He explained that law schools often teach students to be tough, ruthless and flawless in their presentation of cases, but he opts for an alternate route.

“Common wisdom out of law school is to be perfect, strong, impressive, and slick, and I think that’s exactly wrong,” Ponvert said. “Jurors are people, and people respond to others in need, when the other person is in pain or has been hurt and needs help and is willing to admit that.”

Therefore, Ponvert looks to tell his clients' stories by including the good and weak facets to encourage the jurors to connect to the story. Believing in the importance of vulnerability in the courtroom, he tells his clients' stories in ways that tug at the jury's heartstrings, garnering empathy that translates into favorable outcomes for the plaintiffs.

“The common story we all share, I believe, is one of trust and betrayal,” Ponvert said. “Every single lawsuit contains a trust and betrayal story, and I believe every person has at one time in their life trusted someone and been betrayed by that person.”

Although Ponvert hopes his victories will impact the world for the better, he notes that this isn't always the case — in one case, Ponvert represented the wife and children of a man who died of tongue cancer due to chewing tobacco use. The company settled for \$5 million dollars. Despite this large settlement, Ponvert said the tobacco company, and industry as a whole, failed to institute measures to prevent deaths and injury. He said much of the problem is that the industry is so profitable, so manufacturers don’t feel the financial effects of lawsuits.

Ponvert credits Penn Law with providing him with the tools that led to his success, especially noting the influence of Senior Fellow David Rudovsky, who was a first year professor during Ponvert's first year in law school and continues to be a friend and mentor.

Currently, he is working on a case where a young girl contracted Lyme disease at sleep-away camp, despite the camp's advertisement for a four-stage prevention program to protect campers from infected ticks. Through his investigation, however, Ponvert has found the camp may not have done all it could have to protect this girl and her fellow campers. He seeks \$41.75 million for his client in this case as well.

While much of the focus in these cases is the individual clients, Ponvert hopes the rulings may ripple outward and encourage widespread safety. With his most recent case, he hopes camps and other child-care organizations do everything they can to keep the kids safe. For example, he noted that the Cara Munn case encouraged camps and schools to increase their insurance policies in case anything goes wrong, and in turn, insurance companies work to make sure their clients are doing what they can to protect their students.