

2026 Top Women Awardee Melissa Sullivan, Partner, Keating Wagner Polidori Free P.C.

SARAH HUBER | LAW WEEK COLORADO

Melissa Sullivan didn't set out to become a lawyer. As she tells it, law found her.

Now a partner at Keating Wagner Polidori Free P.C., Sullivan said her path to law was "anything but traditional." Her family lived in a small rowhome in Philadelphia, and neither of her parents attended college. Although she only considered higher education after her sister applied, she worked hard, commuting up to two hours each way to a magnet high school. "If something is worth doing, it's worth giving 110%," she said.

Inspired by teachers who shaped her early life, Sullivan initially pursued a career in education, drawn to the sense of purpose ingrained in teaching. Yet, she kept thinking about an earlier conversation with a lawyer, who had suggested that because she loved to learn, she might enjoy a profession in law.

After serving as an educator for three years, Sullivan attended the University of Denver Sturm College of

Law, where she graduated first in her class. Sullivan began her legal career in trusts and estates before a mentor repeatedly commented on her litigation skills.

Ultimately, she said, she found her calling in personal injury law.

In her personal injury practice, Sullivan is "always looking for the opportunity to step in when clients feel overwhelmed and stuck." She said, "Their whole world has turned upside down. If I can take even one piece of that burden off their shoulders, that means everything."

Her emotional investment in clients is part of what sets her apart in law. "I can be their microphone," she said. "I can help them be heard."

Sullivan is quick to credit others for her success. From law partners to her family, she described those who have believed in her as a "big net" of encouragement and support.

Besides extending that net of care to others through her practice, she and her firm support "Grizzly Gives," a fundraising initiative at ThunderRidge High School in Highlands Ranch that benefits families facing serious illness or hardship. She also mentors students interested in law, offering them the same guidance that once altered her trajectory.

"I really believe that big change starts small," she said.

Sullivan was a board member of the Legal Aid Foundation and has been recognized by Colorado Super Lawyers and The Best Lawyers® in America.

