



The LINC –

Pro Bono Lawyer and Patient

Written by: Lynda Fullem, Advancement Officer - Development



Heidi B., CancerLINC Client

Joanna Suyes, Attorney for Heidi's Case
Jimmy Ogle, Husband and Paralegal for Heidi's Case

In April 2024, Heidi B. had already undergone four cancer surgeries and was preparing to undergo her 5th. Her cancer diagnosis and treatment had created a huge financial burden. She had depleted her Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leave allowance and lost her job. Her physician recommended she contact CancerLINC for guidance.

Heidi reached out for help getting through the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) application process and qualifying for the compassionate allowance. (The compassionate allowance expedites SSI claims for individuals with certain severe and life-threatening medical conditions.)

Julia Allen, a member of the CancerLINC Client Services team, spoke with Heidi to understand her needs. She then sent Heidi valuable information on the available resources for cancer patients in the Richmond area. Most important, CancerLINC put Heidi in touch with one of CancerLINC's pro bono attorneys, Joanna Suyes. Suyes Law focuses exclusively on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) claims and appeals to ensure clients secure the benefits they are entitled to through these government programs.

Joanna Suyes has her own connection to cancer. She was first introduced to CancerLINC in the late 1990's when a colleague (who was a CancerLINC volunteer)

asked Joanna to join her at a CancerLINC awards luncheon. Shortly thereafter, Joanna's mom was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and reached out to CancerLINC to inquire about their available services. Joanna began volunteering in 2007, after earning her Juris Doctor (J.D.), cum laude, from the University of Richmond School of Law. She served as an attorney for a personal injury law firm for 16 years before starting her own law practice, Suyes Law in May 2023.

Joanna's commitment to supporting the legal needs of cancer patients is both personal and professional. When she was LINC'ed with Heidi, Joanna immediately set up a conference call with her and her husband to discuss her situation. Joanna reassured Heidi that she would likely qualify for SSDI with the compassionate allowance and encouraged her to apply immediately. Suyes Law provided Heidi with the necessary forms and guided her on completing the application. Once the forms were filled out, Suyes Law electronically submitted Heidi's application on her behalf.

Throughout the SSDI application process, Joanna often called Heidi to check in and see how she was doing. Heidi also communicated with the Suyes Law team through their client portal and was able to track her application online to see any progress being made.

Finally, good news came. Heidi's application was approved, and she was given a back pay settlement for the disability funds she was entitled to receive.

“I really needed some advice, and your organization directed me to Suyes Law,” Heidi told CancerLINC.

She went on to share more feedback on her experience. “WOW! What an incredible firm. They (Suyes Law) had my best interest at heart the entire time. I couldn't have had better representation to help me with the disability process.”

CancerLINC knows that LINC'ing patients and their families with the right resources alleviates stress so they can focus on their cancer journey.

Through comprehensive navigation of non-medical matters, CancerLINC provides legal and financial advising, and community resource referrals to patients when they need it the most.

Thanks to the generosity of our pro bono attorney partners like Joanna Suyes of Suyes Law, clients can secure the legal assistance they urgently need, often at no cost to them (based on income guidelines). CancerLINC pro bono volunteers understand the challenges that a cancer diagnosis can present and are committed to helping.

Everyone has a LINC to cancer. CancerLINC ensures no one has to face cancer alone.

If you would like more information on how CancerLINC can help you or someone you know, please contact us at (804) 562-0371 or visit our website at www.cancerlinc.org.

