

Beth Mitchell likely would not be an attorney for [Disability Rights Texas](#), advocating for the rights of her clients who are in institutions, if it wasn't for a University of Miami School of Law professor who got her interested in mental health law.

Mitchell says going to law school was a fluke; she wasn't sure what she wanted to do after getting her undergraduate degree in marketing from the University of Florida. She taught first grade for a year, then decided to go to law school to make herself more marketable overall.

In her final year of law school, she ended up in a mental health law class, partly because of a personal experience she had when she was young.



"I actually had an experience in a private psych hospital...as a youth, and so that was why I had taken the mental health law course to begin with," Mitchell said. "[I] didn't really think that that was the direction I was going to go but after taking the course, it really piqued my interest to try to be able to help people [who] were in the same situation that I was in."

That law school professor informed Mitchell about [Protection and Advocacy Systems \(P&As\)](#), which work at the state level to protect and fight for the rights of people with disabilities. Upon graduation, Mitchell left her hometown of Miami for Lubbock, where she got a job at the Texas P&A, Disability Rights Texas. After six months in West Texas, she was transferred to Austin.

In her more than 30 years in Austin, Mitchell has become an expert on statutes and regulations and heads up the institutional work at Disability Rights Texas.

"Because I've worked in the area for so long, I've been part of a lot of the changes to the mental health code," Mitchell said.

She has been a part of some big cases in mental health law and enjoys taking on cases that enhance and change the system and make it better for everyone.

One of those cases had the goal of helping people in institutions get the antipsychotic medication Clozaril. The medication had just hit the market and was very expensive, so it wasn't being prescribed to people at the state hospital.

"We filed a lawsuit for people whom all the other medications weren't working and Clozaril would have made a big difference, and we were able to get people medication," Mitchell said.

Helping hospitals change policies because of a case or helping get a client out of a hospital are the kinds of wins that keep Mitchell working in this field.

"It's those type of things that ended up really making a big change and a big impact to people across the board and institutional settings is...what I see is as a big benefit," Mitchell said.





Mitchell also works on making change through legislation and is an active member of the JCMH’s Legislative Research Committee. She was one of the original Commissioners on the JCMH and testified at the hearing that created the Commission.

“The relationships with other people have been great,” Mitchell said. “[I’ve] really [been] able to learn from other people in different parts of the state...[and] what their areas are going through...I think that’s really helpful,” Mitchell said.

Outside of her work advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, Mitchell spends time with her close-knit family. Both her mother and sister moved to Texas from Florida, too.

She likes to read, road bike, or do any other outdoor activities.