

## 2023 NJSBA Fall Conference

### What Attorneys Need to Know about Hoarding Disorder

Most of us are aware of the symptoms of hoarding disorder – a clutter so great that it disrupts the ability of the people who gather the items to use their living spaces for anything other than storage. People with hoarding disorder have persistent difficulty getting rid of or parting with possessions due to a perceived need to save the items. Attempts to part with possessions create considerable distress and lead to decisions to save them. They collect and keep items we don't understand, such as items destroyed by dirt or insects, or food that has been decimated by mold.

The physical manifestation of hoarding disorder leads to myriad legal issues. For example:

- A landlord may petition the court to evict a tenant when excessive possessions or unsanitary conditions violate a lease
- Protective service workers may seek guardianship of children, disabled, or older adults when they determine that the consequences of hoarding disorder constitute abuse or neglect of these individuals
- Members of the public health or fire departments may appear before a judge for a court order to bring a property in compliance with health and safety codes or, in extreme cases, to condemn the property
- Animal welfare workers may petition the court to remove abused or neglected animals from their owner

If your practice involves family law, real estate, land use, animal law, local government, landlord tenant, elder and disability law or any issues that touch on living conditions or quality of life, you will not want to miss this fascinating insight into hoarding disorder. Lauren Williams, a National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals Certified Professional Organizer with decades of experience will help you understand the motivation and causes of hoarding disorder. Lauren and Xiao Sun will discuss the implications for lawyers and provide you with some tools that may help you better handle a legal situation that involves a hoarder.

Speakers:

Speakers:

Xiao Sun, Esq.

*Orloff Lowenbach, Stifelman & Siegel, PA, Morristown*

Lauren Williams, CPO®, CVPO®

*Casual Uncluttering, LLC*

# HOARDING DISORDER

Absolute Basics, for Laypeople

Lauren Williams, CPO®, CVPO®

Casual Uncluttering LLC

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Lauren Williams, Owner of Casual Uncluttering LLC, is a National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals Board-Certified Professional Organizer® and a Certified Virtual Professional Organizer® in business since October 2011. She has a BA from Bryn Mawr College, and an MBA from Baruch College of the City University of New York. She's moved cross country three times - **she understands disruption!** She's been the stay-at-home parent to a special-needs child, but her young person no longer needs those supports. She's divorced and downsized from the 4,600 sq. ft. house to the 1,024 sq. ft. apartment. Lauren has worked with 100s of clients - nuns, doctors, lawyers and many other demanding specialists - and earned 300 hours of continuing education classes so far to keep her using best practices in her vocation. She increasingly specializes in severe chronic disorganization and hoarding projects.



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# OUTLINE

- Fundamentals - How to Understand Hoarding Disorder
- What Makes Hoarding so Difficult?
- Implications for  
Asset-Focused Attorneys
- Tools Which Might Help (a ***Little***)
- Resources:
  - International
  - National
  - State-wide (no guarantees of state-based resources)

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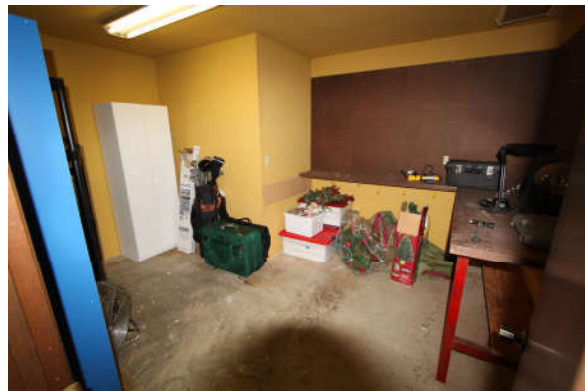
## FUNDAMENTALS – HOW TO UNDERSTAND HOARDING DISORDER

- It is a mental illness, not a lifestyle choice. It has NOTHING to do with "lazy," "stupid," "piggish," "selfish," or anything similar. Neuroscientists are pinpointing the exact sections of the brain which malfunction. The malfunctions make decision-making about one's stuff both more difficult and more frightening and more anxiety-provoking. It is one of the more common mental illnesses, at least 2.5% of the people around the world are thought to suffer from it. Its occurrence is more common than OCD, bipolar disorder, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and PTSD.
- But the effects are even more severe: Isolation from friends, family and society. Hoarding disorder provokes more anger from family against the person with hoarding disorder than any other mental illness. It evokes more general negative emotions from anyone encountering the person with hoarding disorder than for any other mental illness.
- Causes of hoarding behavior and they can commingle: (1) it can be learned; (2) you can inherit a genetic predisposition to it; (3) brain injury; (4) other physical and mental illnesses can have it as a symptom; (5) trauma can set it off
- More frequent co-occurring mental health issues (depression, anxiety)– and it's chicken & egg whether the hoarding causes the other issues or the other issues cause the hoarding. In addition, many people with hoarding disorder do often have distinct neurodiversity challenges – for example ADHD - which may exacerbate the hoarding by making project management difficult.
- More frequent physical consequences: from dust and other contaminants, pest infestations, tripping hazards, things falling on you, risk of fire, risk of food poisoning.
- More frequent legal and financial consequences: overspending, misspending – buying stuff instead of covering expenses, work instability, fines from public authorities, eviction, jail, divorce, losing children to child protective services.

For an exact definition of hoarding disorder, go to the [DSM-5-TR](#) (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) produced by the American Psychiatric Association.

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# WHAT MAKES HOARDING SO DIFFICULT?



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## WHAT MAKES HOARDING SO DIFFICULT?

- Children as young as five have been diagnosed, and it commonly starts notably manifesting in a person's teen years.
- It is considered one of the most intractable mental illnesses. (A) It often comes with low or no insight – self-reflection, an awareness of being ill and/or of the severity of your illness or situation. (B) Its manifestation is unique – that stuff ((and (extreme) quantities of stuff)) is the primary “symptom.”
- Currently, there aren't any medications for it. Sometimes treating the co-existing conditions that the person who hoards may have, such as depression, can help the sufferer address the hoarding behaviors.
- Even the most effective non-medicinal treatments, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and compassion-focused therapy, produce extremely limited results. And backsliding is frequent.

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## WHAT MAKES HOARDING DISORDER SO MUCH MORE INSIDIOUS



It involves whole communities. A hoarded home can mean:

- Minor children growing up in hideous conditions to their significant, life-long detriment.
- Adults left to remediate the damaged environment a hoarding person left behind.
- Neighbors victimized by smells, pest infestations, fire, vulnerable shared public utilities such as sewage lines.
- Overextended public service agencies such as housing authorities trying to enforce laws and/or mitigate circumstances.



## BUT THE NEWS GETS EVEN WORSE

- Clear-outs can be extremely expensive and time-consuming. My most complicated project lasted 285 hours and ***it's not finished***. My shortest project, in a one-bedroom apartment, lasted 58 hours and it also ***is not finished***.
- There are two ways to perform a clear-out: the right way and the wrong way. The right way can lead to safer clients and neighborhoods and reduced chances of a client backsliding. The right way, which can require 100s of man-hours, even with [Hoarders](#)-style teams, involves the voluntary participation of the client at every step of the way to the best of his/her capacity. The wrong way forces the client into the activity. Sometimes there is no choice about the wrong way – it becomes necessary for emergencies. The wrong way can kill people: there are documented instances of people having heart attacks, committing suicide after experiencing a forced clear-out. There is good data that a person who suffers a forced clear-out will often be more significantly hoarded within about a year of having been cleared-out. Even worse than a wrong, forced clear-out is a surprise clear-out, conducted without the client's knowledge.
- Even with a client's voluntary participation, you may never get him/her past a limited level of being safe in his/her own spaces.

## CHALLENGES TO WATCH OUT FOR

- Only a clinician can accurately diagnose hoarding disorder. There are other mental, and sometimes even physical conditions, which can mimic hoarding disorder. Only a clinician can treat hoarding disorder. Other support providers such as professional organizers, housing inspectors, even veterinarians can assist people with hoarding disorder, but they can't treat the clients.
- Seniors are most severely affected by hoarding disorder: they're the people who've spent the longest time building up their accumulations while simultaneously being the most vulnerable to the consequences of their illness. They are also the people who have lived with their illness the longest, so they are often the most resistant to receiving help.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSET-FOCUSED ATTORNEYS

THESE ARE MY THOUGHTS AS A LAYPERSON: WHAT ARE YOUR OPINIONS?

- SELLING PROPERTY WILL PROBABLY TAKE LONGER IF THE PERSON WITH HOARDING DISORDER IS INVOLVED IN THE SALE
- PROPERTY WILL PROBABLY HAVE STRUCTURAL DAMAGE **AND** YOUR CLIENT(S) MAY NOT HAVE MONEY FOR REPAIRS
- PROPERTY MAY NOT HAVE CLEAR TITLE
- PROPERTY MAY BE LOCALLY NOTORIOUS. SERVICE PROVIDERS MAY BE UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE AND/OR THEY MAY NOT RECEIVE PERMISSION TO ENTER THE STRUCTURE.
- THERE MAY BE CONTENTIOUS RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUR CLIENTS. IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS SUCH AS WILLS MAY BE MISSING OR NON-EXISTENT.
- SUMMARY – YOU WILL PROBABLY SELL PROPERTY UNDER MARKET VALUE. SETTLING AN ESTATE MAY BE AN ATYPICALLY PROLONGED PROCESS.
- Mandatory Reporting Responsibilities?

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## TOOLS WHICH MIGHT HELP – A LITTLE

- Start slow: concern yourself with building a relationship before you launch into “How are we going to sell this place?” I once volunteered on a site where it took two years to get the first service provider inside. Find something to compliment.
- Keep a neutral face – keep your reactions to smells, noises, unexpected sights as calm and non-judgmental as you can. If you know you are likely to react to something, say so – I have a colleague who is very sensitive to smells and warns her clients on their first “getting to know you” meeting.
- Ask permission to touch ANYTHING. Ask permission to look inside ANYTHING. Respect “no” as best you can.
- DO NOT MOVE OR REMOVE ANYTHING from the property, even if you deem it hazardous, without your client’s explicit permission.
- If you can – you have time, patience - let your client tell stories about the stuff.
- DO assume that your client is highly intelligent, very creative and has another entire life outside of his/her hoarding. The more forcefully you can remind yourself of that, the easier and easier it is to interact with the human being in front of you.
- Keep a sense of humor.
- Involve your client in the decision-making: avoid “yes, no” questions when you can.

# HOARDING RESOURCES



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## HOARDING RESOURCES

These references are starting points only and are not a guarantee of any particular product, methodology or provider and are not intended to provide any diagnosis or treatment recommendations. You may find other relevant information on my [Neurodiversity Resources page](#) as well. And I offer my appreciation to my [Institute for Challenging Disorganization](#) and [National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals](#) colleagues for this compilation as well: many of these references come from them. I also have a [YouTube channel](#) for visually- and verbally-oriented resources. [Please also take a look at my book reviews - you'll find all sorts of fascinating reads!](#)



# INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

## INTERNATIONAL HOARDING RESOURCES

[Bio-Behavioral Institute](#)

935 Northern Blvd. ~ Suite 102  
Great Neck, NY 11021  
516-487-7116

[Centre for Collaborative Research on  
Hoarding](#)

University of British Columbia  
Department of Psychology  
Douglas Kenny Building  
2136 West Mall  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4  
Canada  
604-822-8025  
[hoarding@psych.ubc.ca](mailto:hoarding@psych.ubc.ca) or [hoarding.entre@ubc.ca](mailto:hoarding.entre@ubc.ca)

[Center for Hoarding and Cluttering](#)

[Hoarding Disorder Assessment Tools](#)

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## INTERNATIONAL HOARDING RESOURCES

### [Hoarding UK](#)

Suite 103  
Davina House  
137-149 Goswell Road  
London EC1V 7ET  
United Kingdom  
[info@hoardinguk.org](mailto:info@hoardinguk.org)

### [Institute for Challenging](#)

[Disorganization](#)  
[International Pages](#)  
2650 S. Hanley Rd, Suite 100  
St. Louis, MO 63144  
314-416-2236

[International OCD Foundation:](#)  
[Hoarding](#)

[Spendaholism Resources](#)

## INTERNATIONAL HOARDING RESOURCES

[The Center for Prolonged Grief](#)  
Columbia School of Social Work  
1255 Amsterdam Avenue  
New York, NY 10027  
212-851-2107  
[info@complicatedgrief.columbia.edu](mailto:info@complicatedgrief.columbia.edu)

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## NATIONAL HOARDING RESOURCES

[Animal Hoarding](#)

[Clutterers Anonymous](#)

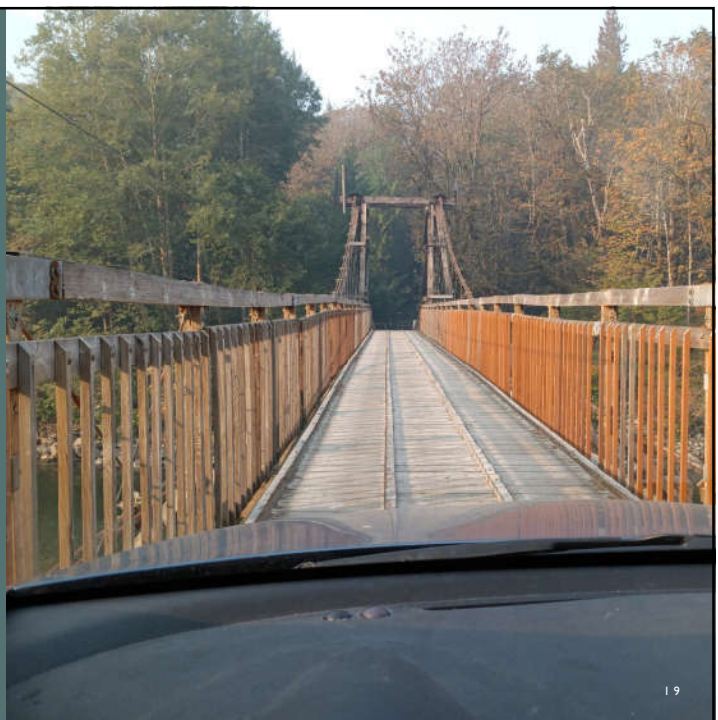
[Children of Hoarders](#)

[Mutual-Support Consulting, LLC](#)

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NATIONAL  
RESOURCES



## NATIONAL HOARDING RESOURCES

[Institute for Challenging  
Disorganization](#)

2650 S. Hanley Rd, Suite 100  
St. Louis, MO 63144  
314-416-2236

[Messies Anonymous](#)

[Mental Health Association of San  
Francisco](#)

870 Market Street, Suite 928  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
415-421-2926  
[info@mentalhealthsf.org](mailto:info@mentalhealthsf.org)

[Minor and Youth Children of Hoarding  
Parents](#)

## NATIONAL HOARDING RESOURCES

[National Association of Productivity  
and Organizing Professionals \(NAPO\)](#)

1120 Rt 73, Suite 200  
Mount Laurel, NJ 08054  
856-380-6828

[National Center for PTSD](#)

[National Institute of Mental Health](#)

[Rogers Behavioral Health](#)  
800-767-4411

## NATIONAL HOARDING RESOURCES

[ServiceMaster Restore](#)

[Steri-Clean \(Hoarders.com\)](#)

[Spendaholism Resources](#)

[The Clutter Movement](#)

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## NATIONAL HOARDING RESOURCES

[The Shulman Center for Compulsive Theft, Spending and Hoarding](#)

P.O. Box 250008  
Franklin, Michigan 48025  
248-358-8508  
[terrenceshulman@theshulmancenter.com](mailto:terrenceshulman@theshulmancenter.com)

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## BOOKS ABOUT HOARDING

[A bunch for children](#)

[Breathing Room: Open Your Heart by decluttering your home](#)

[Children of Hoarders](#)

[Color to Declutter](#) by [Jean Prominski](#)

[Fresh Start: Overcoming Chronic Disorganization and Hoarding Group Manual](#)

[Parents Who Hoard: Things to Consider Before Choosing to Help \(or Not\)](#)

[Recognizing and Treating Hoarding Disorder: How Much is Too Much?](#)

[Rise Above Your Stuff; a Workbook for those Struggling to find Themselves amidst their Stuff](#)

[The Hoarder in You](#)

[The Hoarding Handbook: A Manual for Human Service Professionals](#) - this book is COMPLETELY MISTITLED - this book is an AMAZING resource for ANYONE dealing with the complexities of coordinating services for the clearing out of a hoarded situation and the care of the person exhibiting hoarding behaviors

[The ICD Guides](#)

[Treatment for Hoarding Disorder workbook](#)

[Terina Bainter, Clutter Cutters](#), one of the country's most compassionate experts on hoarding disorder and one of my heroes, and I both recommend these books:

[Buried In Treasures](#)

[Digging Out](#)

[Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding](#)

[Stuff](#)

[The Secret Lives of Hoarders](#)

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## BOOKS ABOUT HOARDING



Terina also recommends  
[The Glass Castle](#)

## MOVIES ABOUT HOARDING

[Beyond Hoarding](#) I had the excellent fortune to see this documentary as a part of the [International OCD Foundation's 2020 Online Hoarding Meeting](#). [My impressions are here](#).

[Clutter](#) Here's my [review](#).

[Grey Gardens](#) Read my [criticism](#).

HBO's 2009 docudrama [Grey Gardens](#) - [finally, a Grey Gardens movie I like](#).

[Hello, My Name is Doris](#) [Loved it!](#)

[Stuffed](#), and I've got it [analyzed](#).

[My Mother's Garden](#) - this is very difficult to find, but worth the search. I watched it by chance: my opinion is [here](#).

[That Summer](#) I had to [talk about it](#).

[The Beales of Grey Gardens](#) This is my [review](#).

## TV SHOWS ABOUT HOARDING

[Hoarding TV shows - WITH PREJUDICE - see why I say so here](#)

[Hoarding TV Shows I LIKE!!!!](#)

[Confessions: Animal Hoarding](#)

[Britain's Biggest Hoarders](#)

[Hoarders](#)

[My Hoarder Mum and Me](#)

[Hoarding: Buried Alive](#)

[The Hoarder Next Door](#)

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STATE  
RESOURCES

(NO  
GUARANTEES OF  
STATE-BASED  
RESOURCES)



## NEW JERSEY HOARDING RESOURCES

[Mental Health Association of New Jersey \(multiple branches\)](#)

NAPO (bordering states have chapters)

[ServiceMaster Restore \(Newark and Essex County\)](#)

[Steri-Clean Northern New Jersey](#)

**There are local resources, but I cannot vet them. They need to be evaluated project-by-project.**

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