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Pro Bono Collaborative E-Newsletter (No. 2) (December 2008)

Roger Williams University School of Law

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Dear Friend of the PBC:

This issue of the PBC e-newsletter includes many exciting new project developments and opportunities to get involved in the Pro Bono Collaborative. Since our last e-newsletter, we launched three new PBC projects: (1) The Foreclosure/Renters' Rights Project; (2) The PrYSM Project; and (3) the Street Sights Project. These projects are highlighted in this issue of the PBC e-newsletter.

In November, the PBC staff joined the RWU Law Feinsein Institute staff to attend a Community Lawyering Workshop at Harvard Law School and the Research Conference on Access to Civil Justice at New York University School of Law. As an innovative model for the delivery and facilitation of pro bono, the PBC continues to attract interest and inquiry among practicing attorneys and academics. Both conferences offered an opportunity for us to gather information that will improve and strengthen the PBC model.

Now more than ever low-income Rhode Islanders and the community-based organizations on which they depend need pro bono legal assistance. If you are not already involved in providing pro bono service through the PBC or the Rhode Island Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyer Program, we urge you to consider volunteering your time. This issue of the PBC e-newsletter includes five new pro bono projects in need of law firms. A description of each project can be found below.

Happy holidays and we thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Eliza Vorenberg, J.D.
Director, Pro Bono Collaborative

Suzanne Harrington-Steppen, J.D.
Project Coordinator, Pro Bono Collaborative



NEWS

One Attorney's Reflection on the PBC

Matt Plain, an associate at Taylor Duane Barton & Gilman LLP and a RWU Law alum, provided a response to an ABA "question of the week" regarding the pros and cons of pro bono. Below is a portion of his posting:



"I am an associate at Taylor Duane Barton & Gilman, LLP, a Providence, Rhode Island law firm and a 2005 graduate of Roger Williams University School of Law. Last summer our firm joined [the PBC] to allow our attorneys to fulfill their pro bono responsibilities, give back to the community, and gain experience in new venues and with different types of clients. The firm's expertise with medical issues and children with disabilities, as well as the significant courtroom experience of our attorneys, led us to choose the PBC Guardianship Project.

We represent low-income parents seeking to obtain or maintain guardianship of their severely and profoundly disabled children through the probate court process. Referrals and client social service support come from the project's CBO partner, [Rhode Island Medical-Legal Partnership for Children](#) and the Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN). RWU law students help with legal research, drafting pleadings, and conducting any other necessary investigation. PBC staff launched the project and play an ongoing facilitative role.

Just yesterday, I attended my first guardianship hearing as part of this project. After the hearing, I felt I had made an important difference for this family, who would not have had legal assistance without the PBC and my firm's involvement. The experience left me energized and eager to find time in my practice to use my legal skills to help the low-income, disenfranchised citizens of our state.

Our experience with pro bono matters, and in particular this project, has been invaluable. . . .Because of the PBC's support, the firm was able to find and embark on a pro bono project that fits nicely into our practice, makes doing pro bono efficient and gratifying for our attorneys and helps us fulfill our ethical responsibility to use our professional skills to help those unable to afford legal assistance. "

The full posting is available:

http://www.abajournal.com/news/pro_bono_pros_and_cons/#comments

Pro Bono Policies Aren't Just For Big Firms

The Pro Bono Collaborative has created a worksheet to assist Rhode Island law firms in creating formal pro bono policies. Creating a formal pro bono policy helps institutionalize the commitment to pro bono and demonstrates to your neighbors in the community that you are serious about helping them. If you would like a copy of the worksheet please email Eliza at evorenberg@rwu.edu

Women's Center Housing Rights Workshop

On December 3, 2008, a full house of residents of the Women's Center of Rhode Island, a domestic violence shelter, attended a housing rights workshop presented by Chris Ayers, Esq., an associate at Hinckley Allen & Snyder LLP and RWU Law students Catherine Lemery, Jennifer Mota and Hans Bremer. Great job to all of our PBC partners!



Chris Myers, Esq, Catherine Lemery,

Jennifer Mota and Tamare Piersaint

New PBC Projects

Foreclosure/Renters' Rights Project

The law firm of **Motley Rice LLC** is working with the Housing Action Coalition of RI and RWU law students to research potential legislative proposals that would create and improve statutory protections for tenants living in foreclosed properties.

The PrYSM Project

Hinckley Allen & Snyder LLP will be working with the Providence Youth Student Movement's (PrYSM) BRIDGE project (Building Rhode Islanders' Development and General Education) researching specific administrative and regulatory provisions identified by PrYSM as barriers to youth who are either preparing to take the GED exam or transitioning back into high school after dropping out.

Street Sights Project

Adler Pollock & Sheehan PC will be authoring a short monthly legal column in Street Sights, a local newspaper about homeless issues. Questions regarding legal issues affecting the homeless will be posed by readers or the staff of the PBC partnering organization, the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless.

Get Involved: Projects Needing Law Firms

1. Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Project

This project would partner the International Institute with a law firm and RWU law students in assisting undocumented immigrant survivors of domestic violence in their petitions to get legal residency. The law involved is relatively straightforward and the Institute has had a good success rate. These matters would involve the

collection of evidence and the drafting of affidavits. RWU law students could assist with evidence gathering and affidavit preparation. Carl Krueger, an attorney at the Institute, will provide training for this project and make referrals.

Time Commitment: Moderate

Number of Attorneys Needed: 2

2. Writ of Mandamus Project

This project would partner the International Institute with a law firm and RWU law students in bringing a writ of mandamus opposing the current USCIS practice of farming out citizenship applications to private firms for "name checks" during the adjudication of these applications.

Time Commitment: Moderate

Number of Attorneys Needed: 1-2

3. Expungement Project

This project would partner The Family Life Center with a law firm and RWU law students in assisting the Center's clients in efforts to have their criminal records expunged. The Family Life Center would screen out the clients who don't meet the eligibility criteria and would remain involved with the client pending the expungement matter. The Center estimates two to four cases per month.

Time Commitment: Moderate (2-4 cases per month)

Number of Attorneys Needed: 2

4. Enforcement of Inclusionary Zoning Law

Research and advise the Women's Development Corporation regarding strategies to enforce the federal inclusionary zoning laws in Rhode Island.

Time Commitment: Moderate-Extensive (depending on whether the project results in litigation)

Number of Attorneys Needed: 1-2

5. School Safety Project- Youth Pride RI

Research and provide advice and counsel to [Youth Pride](#) regarding national initiatives aimed at enforcing non-discrimination laws that including prohibitions against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender, as experienced by transgender youth attending public schools. Many LGBT students attending Rhode Island public schools face discrimination and bullying on a daily basis. [Youth Pride](#) would like advice and counsel regarding Rhode Island's law, how it compares to other states' laws and policies, and recommendations for legal and non-legal strategies to enforce the law in Rhode Island public schools.

Time Commitment: Moderate

Number of Attorneys: 1-2

If any of these projects interest you or your law firm, please contact Suzanne Harrington-Steppen at 401.254.4559.

The PBC Advisory Board

The Pro Bono Collaborative Advisory Board is charged with assisting in the PBC's programmatic integrity and long-term sustainability. We are grateful to our Advisory Board members for their thoughtful assistance over the past year. They are:

Tracy C. Baran, Esq., Partner, Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP

Laurie Barron, J.D., Executive Director, Feinstein Institute for Legal Service, Roger Williams University School of Law

Robert Barge, Esq., Executive Director, Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc.

Anna Cano-Morales, Senior Community Philanthropy Officer, The Rhode Island

Brenda Clement, J.D., Executive Director, State Housing Action Coalition

Mark Denehy, Esq., Managing Partner, Adler Pollock & Sheehan P.C.

Jorge O. Elorza, Esq., Assistant Professor of Law, Roger Williams University School of Law

Susan Fontaine, Public Services Director, RI Bar Association

Seena Franklin, Director of Administration, Children's Friend & Service RI

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Robert McConnell, Esq., Partner, Motley Rice, LLC

Margaret Neubauer, Clinical Supervisor in Early Intervention, Meeting Street School

Beth "Stump" Olsen, OUTSpoken Coordinator, Youth Pride, Inc.

Paul Pasaba, Program Coordinator, PrySm

Matthew R. Plain, Esq., Taylor Duane Barton & Gilman, LLP

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Liz Tobin Tyler, Esq., Director of Public Service & Community Partnerships, Feinstein Institute for Legal Service, Roger Williams University School of Law

Joseph D. Whelan, Esq., Partner, Hinckley Allen Snyder LLP

Judicial Advisors

The Honorable Edward C. Clifton, Associate Justice, Rhode Island Superior Court

The Honorable George E. Healy, Jr., Chief Judge, Rhode Island Workers'

The Honorable Jeanne E. LaFazia, Associate Justice, Kent County District Court

The Honorable Howard I. Lipsey, Associate Justice, Rhode Island Family Court

The Honorable O. Rogeriee Thompson, Associate Justice, Washington County District Court

The Honorable Frank J. Williams, Chief Justice, Rhode Island Supreme Court
Foundation Compensation Court

Donate to the PBC

The PBC needs your help. If you would like to make a financial contribution please make checks payable to: *RWU School of Law, Pro Bono Collaborative*.

Please send contributions to:

The PBC, RWU School of Law, 10 Metacom Avenue, Bristol, RI 02809

The Pro Bono Collaborative is a grant-funded project at the Roger Williams University School of Law, a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit institution. All contributions to the PBC are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.

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