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Newsroom: PBC Marks National Pro Bono Celebration

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Newsroom

PBC Marks National Pro Bono Celebration

RWU Law's Pro Bono Collaborative pairs law students, law firms and community organizations to deliver legal help to the poor and vulnerable.



Bristol, R.I., Oct. 20, 2011: Business lawyers

have resources. Low-income communities have legal needs. The Pro Bono Collaborative (PBC) at Roger Williams University School of Law brings them together to serve poor and underserved communities throughout the region.

Tapping into the expertise of transactional lawyers to serve the greater community is a national model and part of the successes being celebrated Oct. 23 – 29 as part of the National Pro Bono Celebration sponsored by the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service.

Since its founding, the PBC has worked with 12 major law firms, more than 30 community-based organizations and scores of law students, meeting specific needs with targeted legal expertise. The PBC mobilizes Rhode Island law firms, law students and community organizations in a unique three-way partnership that provides desperately needed legal assistance for underserved residents of the state.

Through their work on PBC projects, RWU Law students assist community-based organizations and those they serve, including the homeless; at-risk youth; immigrant workers; low-income families with severely disabled children; and individuals in need of expungement counseling. Past projects have assisted Southeast Asian youth, Liberian refugees and victims of domestic violence.



“The PBC was created in response to a demonstrated need for more pro bono legal service in Rhode Island, and a recognition that lawyers who do not litigate, particularly those in larger firms, were looking for ways to use their extensive legal skills to do pro bono work,” explains PBC Director, Eliza Vorenberg, a seasoned lawyer with both public-interest and private-sector experience.

Law firms currently participating in the PBC are Burns & Levinson LLP; Edwards Wildman Palmer LLP; Hinckley Allen Snyder LLP; Motley Rice LLC; Nixon Peabody LLP; Pannone Lopes Devereaux & West LLP; Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP; Ratcliffe Harten Burke & Galamaga LLP; Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc., Taylor Duane Barton & Gilman LLP; and Whelan & Siket LLP.

Recognizing the need for pro bono service, the National Law Journal recently noted, “With the spike in the U.S. poverty population resulting from the Great Recession and the precipitous drop in funding and staffing of legal services programs, it’s likely that the documented 80% of low-income Americans without access to a lawyer has grown to an unthinkable 90%. Today, poor families in the wealthiest nation in the world — and moderate-income people as well — have a far better chance of winning the lottery than of finding the justice we promise our people.”

The PBC represents a major step toward correcting that wrong.