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Rhode Island's Top Lawyer



Peter Kilmartin, RWU Class of 1998

Juris Doctor Alumni

As he enters his eighth and final year as Rhode Island's attorney general, Peter F. Kilmartin '98, B.A. '88, can claim by several measures to be the school's most prominent alumnus. But he claims there was never any master plan.

Still, having served 24 years as a Pawtucket police officer, with an extended stint as officer in charge of prosecutions ... 20 years in the state legislature, championing laws on such issues as tougher penalties for domestic violence offenders ... earning a criminal justice degree and, a decade later, a juris doctor (both degrees from RWU) ...

It is tempting to connect the dots on Kilmartin's CV and conclude he's been running for AG ever since he first joined the police force in 1984. Kilmartin shakes his head: three years before he ran, "if you'd told me I'd be sitting in the attorney general's office, it wasn't even on my radar screen," he says.

But when friends and colleagues pushed him to consider a campaign, Kilmartin became intrigued. Upon closer inspection, his law enforcement credentials, his legal expertise and the legislation he'd espoused on behalf of preceding attorneys general seemed to create a unique

package of skills. More importantly, Kilmartin knew he could deliver the energy and interest needed for the demanding role.

“This is a statewide, full-time commitment – you have to want this job,” he says. “This office deals with so many aspects of life in Rhode Island beyond prosecuting criminals. That excites me. It isn’t unlike being a police officer or a zealous advocate. You’re there to do the best job you can possibly do on behalf of your client; and in this case, your clients are the citizens of Rhode Island.”

Bruce Kogan – who recently retired as a founding member of RWU Law’s faculty, and was a member of Kilmartin’s first-term transition team – remembers Kilmartin as an eager student and a tireless worker who, like many of his fellow law enforcement officers in the evening division, had to dedicate extra time to nail down concepts that ranged beyond the criminal justice portion of the law curriculum. And while Kogan might not have predicted Kilmartin’s ascent to attorney general, he’s also not surprised.

“Peter didn’t get his legal education to jump out and do defense work or become a patent lawyer,” Kogan says. “That was never in his bones – even [when he was a student], I always saw him as a public sector person. In his fiber, he’s a law enforcement guy.”

Indeed, as the first police officer to be elected AG in Rhode Island, Kilmartin has faced criticism that he might unduly favor a cop’s-eye view of cases. Kilmartin disagrees: “My police experience provides good perspective on what this office should be about – protecting the victims, looking after their interests and achieving justice on their behalf.”

As RWU Law’s first graduate to sit in the AG’s chair, Kilmartin saw his rise to prominence as mirroring RWU Law’s evolving place in the fabric of Rhode Island. “All of a sudden, it’s like it’s always been here,” he said at the time of his election in 2010. “It’s the resource that people naturally go to for input on issues in the legal community. And it’s here to stay.”