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# RWU Law Student Receives Skadden Fellowship to Pursue Public-Interest Law

Third-year law student Michaela Bland will work with Rhode Island Center for Justice to find legal solutions to “school-to-prison pipeline”



November 27, 2018

By Edward Fitzpatrick

BRISTOL, R.I. – For the first time, a [Roger Williams University School of Law](#) student is receiving one of the coveted Skadden Fellowships that allow talented young lawyers to pursue the practice of public-interest law on a full-time basis.

Michaela Bland, a third-year law student who will graduate from RWU Law this spring, was selected to receive one of 28 [Skadden Fellowships awarded](#) this year. She plans to work with the [Rhode Island Center for Justice](#) to find legal solutions to the “school-to-prison pipeline,” a national trend in which children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Over the years, Skadden Fellowships have become known as the public-interest world’s version of U.S. Supreme Court clerkships. Each year, more than 200 law students apply for the 28 fellowships. The fellowships have launched the legal careers of hundreds of public-interest attorneys, with 90 percent of Skadden Fellows remaining in public-interest law.

“Our primary goal is to help prepare our students to change their world,” RWU Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky said. “It is humbling and exhilarating to work with a student as gifted and

passionate as Michaela. I am thrilled for her that the Skadden Foundation has recognized that her vision and talent are worthy of their investment.”

The vast majority of Skadden Fellowships have gone to graduates of the most elite law schools. In the last 10 years, the law schools with the most Skadden Fellowships have been Harvard (55), Yale (40), New York University (28), Stanford (20) and the University of Pennsylvania (15). This marks the first time a RWU Law student has received a Skadden Fellowship, and it represents a milestone in RWU Law’s development as a law school with genuine depth in public-interest law.

“Michaela is an extraordinary student – full of passion, commitment, and talent – who came to law school specifically to be a public-interest lawyer,” said Laurie Barron, director of the [Feinstein Center for Pro Bono and Experiential Education](#) at RWU Law. “Her project on the school-to-prison pipeline is one that will change the landscape in Rhode Island. As the first RWU law student to ever receive a Skadden Fellowship, she is poised to be a trailblazer inspiring future generations of public interest students. We could not be more thrilled for Michaela, who is so deserving.”

Bland, an Ithaca College graduate born in Chili, N.Y., said receiving the Skadden Fellowship has been a surreal experience.

“I cannot thank the Feinstein Center for Pro Bono and Experiential Learning at RWU Law and the Rhode Island Center for Justice enough for their constant support and guidance,” Bland said. “My fellowship project will dismantle discriminatory discipline practices, which have funneled minority students into the school-to-prison pipeline, and it will continue to build Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream for children to ‘one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character’ into a reality.”

The Skadden Fellowship Foundation launched in 1988 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, which has become the largest public-interest law firm in the United States. The applicants must propose a public-interest project and find a sponsoring organization willing to host them. The sponsoring organization must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that provides civil legal services to the poor, including the working poor, the elderly, the disabled or those deprived of their civil or human rights.

Based in downtown Providence, the [Rhode Island Center for Justice](#) is a nonprofit law center created in cooperation with RWU Law and home to the RWU Law Center for Justice Fellowship Program, which hires RWU Law graduates interested in pursuing careers in public interest.

“It is a great honor and privilege to serve as the host for Michaela's Skadden Fellowship,” said Jennifer Wood, executive director of the Rhode Island Center for Justice. “Using the legal system to address the school-to-prison pipeline at its source – in the schools – is an exciting approach, and we are looking forward to getting this work underway.”