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## Law School News: AALS Honors Barron With Major Pro Bono Award 11/14/2019

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November 14, 2019

# ***Law School News***

## **AALS Honors Barron with Major Pro Bono Award**

Longtime Feinsein Center director Laurie Barron has been honored for expanding legal services by 'forwarding the ethic of pro bono service' in the law school and beyond.



Laurie Barron, director of the Feinsein Center for Pro Bono & Experiential Education at RWU Law.

November 14, 2019

Michael M. Bowden

The Association of American Law Schools has chosen Laurie Barron, director of the Feinsein Center for Pro Bono & Experiential Education at Roger Williams University School of Law, to receive a major national award for her work expanding the availability of legal services for the neediest by “forwarding the ethic of pro bono service” in the legal community.

Barron was selected from a wide field of candidates to receive the 2020 Father Robert Drinan Award, presented annually by the AALS Section on Pro Bono and Public Service Opportunities to “a full-time faculty or staff member at a law school who has forwarded the ethic of pro bono service through personal service, program design or management,” and who has “dedicated significant efforts towards increasing access to justice through the law school environment, and who inspire[s] similar efforts from others”

The award will be formally presented at the AALS Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., on January 4, 2020.

Barron’s colleagues are applauding the decision.

“Having dedicated her entire career to engaging in and encouraging others to engage in public interest law, Laurie is the perfect recipient of this very prestigious award,” said Professor Andrew Horwitz, RWU Law’s Dean for Experiential Education. “She is persistent and tireless in advocating for expanded opportunities for our students and graduates in the public interest arena.”

Horwitz added that Barron’s selection would have pleased Father Robert Frederick Drinan (1920-2007), the Georgetown law professor, Roman Catholic priest, human rights activist, and U.S. Representative (D-Mass.) for whom the award is named, and with whom Horwitz was acquainted.

“I can say with great confidence that Father Drinan would have been thrilled with Laurie’s boundless energy, eternal optimism, and complete dedication to serving her students and the public,” Horwitz said.

Barron herself also expressed gratitude for the recognition.

“I am humbled to receive this tremendous honor,” she said. “I am also deeply grateful to my dedicated, hard-working colleagues – Eliza Vorenberg, Director of Pro Bono & Community Partnerships; Suzy Harrington-Steppen, Associate Director of Pro Bono Programs; and Lisa Quinn, Program Coordinator – who make our collective vision for the pro bono program at RWU Law a reality every day.”

“I also want to thank all of my other colleagues at RWU Law for their support, including those who help provide us with the resources we need to succeed,” Barron added. “And last but not least, thanks are due to my remarkable and resilient students, my colleagues outside of RWU Law, our alumni and, of course, the AALS.”

### ‘An Absolute Rock Star’

In a statement, the AALS Section on Pro Bono and Public Service Opportunities explained the reasoning behind its choice of Barron for the award.

“Laurie Barron has built one of the top public interest law programs in the nation,” the statement said. “When Laurie became the Director of RWU’s Feinstein Center in 2001, it was a tiny program and she was the only (part-time) attorney. Under her leadership, the Center has grown tremendously in its capacity to serve law students and the community. Laurie, together with her amazing staff, has increased the pro bono requirement from 20 to 50 hours, transformed it into a Pro Bono Experiential Learning Requirement, created a nationally recognized program called the Pro Bono Collaborative, and institutionalized a robust Alternative Spring Break program that sent over 75 students to 20 placements in 8 different states in 2019. She helped to create RWU’s Public Interest Loan Repayment Assistance Program. She has pushed to make public interest programming a “main event” at the law school’s orientation. Thanks to her leadership, the

Center is also a major player in the access to justice movement in Rhode Island.”

The statement continued, “Laurie is a community-builder. She nurtures and inspires RWU’s public interest students and alumni. She opens her home to them. (Apparently, her potlucks are legendary.) She remains a mentor long after students graduate. Laurie is also a thoughtful scholar and a national leader in public interest externship pedagogy. Laurie Barron is, as one nominator noted, ‘an absolute rock star.’”

In a statement supporting Barron’s nomination, Vorenberg, Harrington-Steppen and Quinn also extolled Barron’s achievements:

“For over 30 years, first as a public interest lawyer and now in academia, Laurie has dedicated herself to supporting clients, students and her colleagues,” they said. “She is an eternal optimist with the commitment and enthusiasm to advocate for, support and motivate others. Laurie insists that her staff and students have the space to create, innovate and make mistakes. Her energetic, compassionate and curious leadership style has resulted in a nationally recognized public interest program; hundreds of public interest law students and alumni who credit Laurie with nurturing their public interest dreams, both during law school and after; and a community of colleagues and friends from across the country who rely on her thoughtfulness, expertise and guidance in teaching and designing public interest externship programs.”

Alumnus Marcus Swift ’14, of Overland Law, LLC, in The Dalles, Oregon, counted himself among those whose careers were positively impacted by Barron’s work.

“Like hundreds of students who have attended RWU Law, Laurie has had a profoundly positive impact on my life, my education,

and my career,” Swift said. “Her work has created a national network of lawyers who are passionate about public interest law and pro bono causes and who carry her lessons into their practice every day. No one person has had a larger impact on my legal education and career than Laurie Barron. From the start of law school until today, she has greatly influenced the way I view the law, how I practice law, and how I treat clients. Her impact on our justice system is immeasurable. Her impact on my life has been, too. I can think of no other person in the legal community who is more deserving of this award.”

### Passion and Compassion

A group of academic colleagues from across the country submitted a nomination observing that “Laurie is a thoughtful scholar. Her work is collaborative and pragmatic. She is always making sure others can pick it up and use it immediately. While Laurie’s writing is clear and accessible, she writes on topics intended to help us better support our students and ensure they are making meaningful contributions to our profession and being intentional about their approaches to their work, which we think makes her a great fit for this award.”

Robin Steinberg of The Bail Project in Venice, Calif., with whom Barron worked in the earliest days of her legal career, called her “a visionary [and] one of the most powerful, persuasive and important advocates in the nation for public interest and social justice lawyering.” Steinberg added:

“Laurie has used academia as a force multiplier, passing on to generations of students her boundless passion and optimism. In doing so she has not only touched the lives of those lucky enough to have her as an advisor, mentor or friend. She has touched the lives of those who need it most—the clients her students go into the world to serve. No one comes away from being taught by Laurie without a profound understanding of how passion and

compassion can work together in the pursuit of justice. Because that is who she is, and that is what she stands for.”

In its announcement, the AALS Section on Pro Bono and Public Service Opportunities also named Aviam Soifer, Dean of the William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, as the 2020 recipient of the Drinan Award’s companion honor, the Deborah L. Rhode Award, presented annually to “a full-time faculty member or dean who has made an outstanding contribution to increasing pro bono and public service opportunities in law schools through scholarship, leadership, or service.”

Laurie Barron is the Director of the Feinstein Center for Pro Bono & Experiential Education. She received a B.A. from Yale University, a J.D. from New York University School of Law, and an M.S.W. from New York University School of Social Work.

Her previous work includes representing children at the Juvenile Rights Division of the Legal Aid Society in New York City; working as a public defender and team leader at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem; and clinical teaching in an interdisciplinary Prisoners and Families Clinic at Columbia Law School, in a School-Based Legal Services Clinic at Rutgers-Camden School of Law, and in a Juvenile Rights Advocacy Project at Boston College Law School.