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## Law School News: RWU Law Recognized By White House 01-28-2022

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*Roger Williams University School of Law*

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January 28, 2022

# *Law School News*

## RWU Law Recognized by White House

Roger Williams among law schools thanked by U.S. Attorney General Garland for work addressing housing and eviction crisis, increasing housing stability, and improving access to justice.

January 28, 2022

| Michael M. Bowden



RWU Law was among the law schools thanked by U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland on Jan 28, 2022, for their work addressing the housing and eviction crisis, increasing housing stability, and improving access to justice.

WASHINGTON, D.C. —Roger Williams University School of Law was recognized today by the White House at an event thanking law schools that had “responded to the U.S. Attorney General’s call to address the housing and eviction crisis, and help increase housing stability and access to justice in their communities.”

Last August 30, United States Attorney General Merrick Garland [called on law schools and law firms to help fight evictions](#), following a [U.S. Supreme Court decision](#) that removed protections created by the federal government in response to the pandemic. Ninety-nine law schools across the country responded.

Garland personally thanked them at the online event.

“You assisted your clients and your communities at a time when they needed it the most, when our country needed it the most,” he said. “As law students, as leaders of some of our nation’s law schools, and as lawyers, you are uniquely positioned to help fill the gaps in our legal system.”

*“We are proud to use RWU Law’s Pro Bono Collaborative as a vehicle to respond to Attorney General Garland’s call for law schools to step up and assist with the current eviction crisis.”*

~ *Suzanne Harrington-Steppen*

In his closing remarks, Garland directly addressed law students in the audience.

“In the words of [President John F.] Kennedy, you are the new generation of Americans to whom the torch of legal obligation is being passed,” he said. “Your service over these past 151 days assures me that the torch remains in good hands. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Associate Attorney General of the U.S. Vanita Gupta also spoke, noting that state court programs to help tenants threatened with eviction “cannot do it alone.”

“They need all of you – law students willing to step up and make a difference – to make these programs work,” Gupta said. “We know we have an incredible network of legal services organizations around the country that have stepped up to meet this moment, and we are so grateful. But we also knew that we needed to activate the law school communities around the country to meet the challenge as well.”

Other speakers at the event included Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff; Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo; and Gene Sperling, Senior Advisor to the President, and Coordinator of the American Rescue Plan.

‘Hard, Sad, Relentless’ Work

News of the honor was met with enthusiasm at RWU Law.

“I am so proud of my colleagues and our students – our future colleagues – at RWU Law, for their extraordinary response to Attorney General Garland’s call last summer,” [Dean Gregory Bowman](#) said. “At RWU Law, providing public service and representing the unrepresented is part of our institutional DNA; it’s something we do every day. It was so impressive and gratifying to see our Feinstein Center for Experiential Education and the [Pro Bono Collaborative](#) rise to the challenge of the eviction crisis.”

Laurie Barron, Director of RWU Law's [Feinstein Center for Pro Bono & Experiential Education](#), thanked her colleagues [Eliza Vorenberg](#), Director of Pro Bono & Community Partnerships, and [Suzanne Harrington-Steppen](#), Associate Director of Pro Bono Programs, for their efforts in designing and leading the school's response in partnership with [Rhode Island Legal Services \(RILS\)](#) and the [Rhode Island Center for Justice \(RICJ\)](#).

"Liza and Suzy created this project in the fall, without any reduction in any other work, to make this happen in Rhode Island," Barron said.

"Since late September, with the help of 14 RWU Law students, we've been able to assist over 200 tenants facing eviction, many of them at risk of homelessness," Vorenberg said. "We couldn't be prouder of our law students who stepped up to help."

Harrington-Steppen agreed, adding that the work is ongoing.

"Each day dozens of Rhode Islanders end up in local courthouses, confronted with losing their homes. They're nearly all without legal representation," she said. "We are honored to have them working hand in hand with RILS and the RICJ to provide these unrepresented tenants advice and counsel."

That work, Barron explained, is "hard, sad, and relentless," involving "countless hours and days in the hallways of District Court, in both Providence and Kent County – masked in the midst of a raging pandemic – working with a team of dedicated law students to help unrepresented tenants at risk of eviction."

Their successful efforts were facilitated by RWU Law's strong and well-established public service infrastructure, said Assistant Dean of Students [Lorraine Lalli](#).

"RWU Law took such a leadership role during the pandemic to help communities in need," Lalli said. "Housing was already a priority for our pro bono projects, but this work was accelerated and increased in really important ways. Being well-positioned to address the most urgent needs of society requires a long term commitment and requires organizations to be well positioned to identify and shift resources to respond. The work of the Feinstein Center and the Pro Bono Collaborative has been tremendous, and has impacted the lives of Rhode Islanders in so many significant ways."

Said Harrington-Steppen, "We are proud to use RWU Law's Pro Bono Collaborative as a vehicle to respond to Attorney General Garland's call for law schools to step up and assist with the current eviction crisis."