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Michael M. Bowden

Roger Williams University School of Law

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February 22, 2022

Law School News

RWU Law Receives Major Gift & Matching Challenge to Launch Scholarship Supporting Diverse Students, Public Interest Careers

R.I. Attorney Mark Mandell challenges the legal community to raise \$750,000 in support of diverse and public interest scholars at state's only law school. The goal is nearly halfway met.

February 22, 2022

| Michael M. Bowden



Zachary Mandell '11, Yvette M. Boisclair, and Mark S. Mandell

Prominent Rhode Island trial lawyer Mark S. Mandell has made a major matching gift to Roger Williams University School of Law, with the goal of providing \$750,000 in scholarships to help diversify the legal profession and increase access to justice in the Ocean State and beyond.

The Mandell-Boisclair Justice Scholarship Fund will provide endowed scholarships to RWU Law for diverse law students, and those intending to practice public interest law. Mandell has donated an initial \$250,000 to the Fund, and pledged up to an additional \$250,000 to match other individual donations made to the Fund over the next five years. With the goal of raising \$750,000 in total, the Fund could annually support \$5,000 scholarships for eight students, totaling \$15,000 each over their three years in law school.

“The Mandell-Boisclair Justice Scholarship Fund is a reflection of our family’s commitment to social, economic and legal justice,” said Mandell, senior partner in the Providence firm of Mandell, Boisclair, & Mandell, Ltd. “We recognize that we have been blessed in our lives in so many important ways. We believe that with those blessings comes the responsibility to help others achieve their potential. We recognize the importance of giving back.”

The Mandell-Boisclair Justice Scholarship Fund is part of a continuum of financial support from the Mandell family that has helped further the School of Law’s mission of changing the legal profession by encouraging both diverse and underrepresented students, as well as careers in public interest law. Several years ago, the family provided key funding for the School of Law’s highly successful Pro Bono Collaborative program, through which RWU Law students and faculty members partner with law firms and community service organizations to provide essential legal assistance to communities and individuals in need throughout Rhode Island and its surrounding regions.

“People often complain that there are too many lawyers—but that is not really accurate,” said RWU Law Dean Gregory W. Bowman. “Instead, the problem is twofold. First, the legal profession needs to reflect the diverse society we serve. Second, we need more lawyers working in the public interest field. The Mandell family’s generous gift is a really meaningful step forward in addressing both of these issues. The School of Law is profoundly grateful for their generosity.”

Widely recognized for his pivotal leadership role in such meaningful and high-profile litigation as the Station Nightclub Fire case, and for his success in the many important civil trials he has won in his 47 years as a trial lawyer, Mandell is also a distinguished and longtime member of the RWU and RWU Law communities. He has served on the University’s Board of Trustees and the School of Law’s Board of Directors, including as chair—preceding the Board’s current chair, the Honorable William E. Smith. Mandell and his wife and law partner, Yvette M. Boisclair, are also the proud parents of RWU Law alumnus Zachary Mandell ’11, who currently serves on the law school’s Board of Directors and on its Champions for Justice Host Committee.

“The Mandells’ gift is special and powerful. In both size and scope, it redefines the idea of giving to the University,” said RWU Board of Trustees Chair Tim Baxter ’83, former President and CEO of Samsung Electronics and the first RWU graduate to lead the Board. “By engaging the entire community in common purpose, it increases the impact of our individual gifts. It

widens the impact of the School of Law, and ultimately it helps to ensure the legal profession reflects the society we serve and focuses on critically important public interest work.”

Over the past decade, RWU Law has seen its percentage of students identifying as racially diverse nearly double, from 14 percent in 2011 to 27 percent today. The Mandell gift will help the law school maintain and increase such improvements.

“I am beyond thrilled to see my alma mater taking a national lead in launching bold and essential initiatives that seek to both diversify our legal community and improve access to justice for all of Rhode Island’s court users,” said the Honorable Melissa R. DuBose ’04, associate justice of the Rhode Island District Court and current member of RWU Law’s Board of Directors. Judge DuBose chairs the Board’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and also serves on the law school’s Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee.

The Mandells’ gift also aligns with other current School of Law initiatives aimed at enhancing diversity in legal education to achieve greater inclusiveness in the legal profession. RWU Law’s groundbreaking “Race and the Foundations of American Law” course is one of the first mandatory classes at any U.S. law school to offer important and often overlooked perspectives on race and the law, and their impact on modern legal practice.

Last year, RWU Law began cosponsoring an innovative “Integrating Doctrine & Diversity Speaker Series,” together with the City University of New York School of Law and JURIST, a legal news and commentary service. Each installment of the speaker series has drawn hundreds of legal education professionals from across the country. Based on a 2021 textbook coedited by RWU Law and CUNY instructors, the series focuses on practical strategies for putting diversity and inclusion goals into action in the law school classroom.

“I join the Rhode Island legal community in thanking the Mandell family for their breathtakingly generous gift to RWU Law, their commitment to public interest law, and their support of historically underrepresented students,” Judge DuBose added. “This is truly amazing!”

Initial individual matching contributions to the Fund have already increased the scholarship’s value to \$320,000. The University is planning a major campaign to ensure that the gift reaches its maximum potential.