

Roger Williams University

DOCS@RWU

Life of the Law School (1993-)

Archives & Law School History

3-22-2024

Law School News: RWU School Of Law Launches Institute For Race And The Law And Celebrates Champions For Justice 3-22-2022

Roger Williams University School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life



Part of the [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), [Law and Race Commons](#), [Law and Society Commons](#), [Legal Education Commons](#), and the [Legal Profession Commons](#)

Law School News: RWU School of Law Launches Institute for Race and the Law and Celebrates Champions for Justice

The March 21 event honored champions in Rhode Island's legal system and business community, while introducing the law school's new institute focused on legal education, research and legal services advancing racial equity

March 22, 2024



School of Law Dean Gregory W. Bowman speaks at the 10th annual Champions for Justice event, which honored champions in the legal system and business community on March 21.

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Roger Williams University School of Law celebrated its growing leadership in racial justice legal education with the official launch of an [Institute for Race and the Law](#) and honored champions in the legal system and business community at the annual [Champions for Justice](#) event on March 21.

As part of its 30th anniversary celebration year, RWU School of Law marked the next step as national leaders on race in the law and the legal system with the opening of the Roger Williams University School of Law Institute for Race and the Law, which will provide legal education, legal research and policy work, and legal services that advance racial equity in Rhode Island and across the country. The institute represents the evolution of the law school's innovative social justice work that has been central to its mission since the school's founding in 1993.

At the event, which took place at The Graduate Providence, School of Law Dean Gregory W. Bowman highlighted RWU Law's achievements over the past three decades.

“In our 30 years as Rhode Island’s only law school, Roger Williams University School of Law has made an indelible mark by advancing the diversity and talent of our state’s bench and bar and by providing critical legal services to Rhode Island residents and communities,” Dean Bowman said. “The Institute for Race and the Law will significantly amplify our work as a national leader in teaching and research on the intersection of race and the law and training lawyers who advocate for and create change.”

An advocate for the law school’s mission and work, State of Rhode Island Governor Daniel J. McKee lauded the expanding equity work that RWU Law will be leading with the launch of the Institute for Race and the Law.

“Roger Williams University has a rich tradition of fostering bright legal minds, many of whom continue to serve our state today,” said Governor Dan McKee. “The Institute for Race and the Law will help aspiring attorneys and judges champion the values of equality, justice, and fairness, driving positive change and progress for all Rhode Islanders.”

Among its accomplishments, RWU School of Law has trained and graduated more than 6,000 lawyers, helped thousands of Rhode Islanders in need through legal clinics and pro bono work, and diversified the state’s bench and bar – including seeing [alumna Melissa DuBose](#) appointed as Rhode Island’s first Black and LGBTQ+ judge to the U.S. District Court of Rhode Island – ensuring that the legal profession better reflects the public it serves. In addition, RWU Law has taught its innovative [instructional program on how to teach race and the law](#) to faculty and staff at more than 95 percent of law schools across the United States, serving as a national model and leading the vanguard of this important work.

In addition to celebrating RWU Law’s work in the region, the event also honored champions of our legal system and business community who embody the spirit of justice. The following honorees were presented with awards from the Roger Williams University School of Law.

John Karwashan, Esq., a law school graduate of the class of 2015 and supervising attorney at the Rhode Island Center for Justice at RWU Law, received the Alumni Public Interest Champion Award. Before joining the center, Karwashan was an assistant public defender at the Rhode Island Public Defender’s office for more than three-and-a-half years and ran his own criminal defense practice for two years, practicing in both state and federal courts. For nearly a decade he has served as a mentor to RWU Law students and has supervised student interns and externs throughout his career. In addition to serving on the RWU Law Pro Bono Collaborative Advisory Board for several years, Karwashan was a pro bono supervising attorney for the Pro Bono Collaborative’s ACI Civil Legal Clinic Project and has consulted on several other Pro Bono Collaborative projects.

On behalf of the City of Central Falls, R.I., **Central Falls Mayor Maria Rivera**, who graduated from Roger Williams University with a B.A. in Public Administration in 2019, and **Matthew Jerzyk, Esq.**, a 2008 RWU Law alumnus and the Central Falls City Solicitor, accepted the Community Partner Champion Award. The City of Central Falls has facilitated law student pro bono service during an Alternative Spring Break program and Jerzyk has worked with dozens of RWU Law students in his office through the public interest externship program. Additionally,

Rivera and Jerzyk re-launched the Domestic Violence Task Force with the help of an RWU Law extern, and this spring an extern is working on improving housing conditions for residents of the city. Central Falls has also been a leader in educating and preventing lead poisoning in the city's housing stock.

The Honorable Christopher K. Smith, an RWU Law alumnus of 2007, received the Champion for Justice Award. Appointed by Gov. McKee in 2023, he currently serves as an Associate Justice on the Rhode Island Superior Court. Prior to this position, he was appointed by then-Governor Gina Raimondo to the Rhode Island District Court in 2019. Before joining the bench, Judge Smith practiced law at the Rhode Island Public Defender's Office where he rose from an Assistant Public Defender to the Chief of the District Court Unit. As a public defender, he supervised dozens of RWU Law students, inspiring many to pursue careers in public defense. While on the bench, Judge Smith has continued to engage law students in public service, most recently when he helped launch the Rhode Island District Court Eviction Help Desk. He is also a frequent guest speaker in many RWU Law classes.

The main sponsors of this year's event included Chisholm, Chisholm & Kilpatrick; Jones Kelleher; Mandell, Boisclair & Mandell; Robinson + Cole; and Motley Rice, LLC. For a full list of sponsors, visit the [Champions for Justice website](#).