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# Changemaker: Samuel Filiaggi: Juris Doctorate: The Powerful Combination of Representation and Advocacy

Samuel Filiaggi L'25

October 7, 2024

Danna Lorch



3L Samuel Filiaggi, RWU Law Class of 2025

Last November, 3L Samuel Filiaggi, a dual degree JD and MMA student, enjoyed a Friendsgiving dinner at a table of peers and faculty at an event co-sponsored by the RWU Law LGBT+Alliance and the Mental Health Club. It was a lot of fun and the food was delicious but that isn't what really stood out to him.

Filiaggi, the Alliance's treasurer, a transgender man, said, "I knew that for some people there, this was the only place where they could bring their whole selves to the table." A major reason he is becoming a lawyer is to serve as a resource and an advocate for others in the LGBT+ community.

Although his own experience pursuing gender-affirming treatment in Rhode Island was straightforward, Filiaggi still describes it as "overwhelming" and is keenly aware of how, in other states, people face significant roadblocks and rights violations.

"One of the things that pointed me towards law school was the idea of becoming someone who can push for change in issues of inequality. I want to be someone other people go to for help," he said.

Filiaggi didn't have any clue that a legal career was in his future while he was studying Marine Affairs as an undergraduate at the University of Rhode Island. His experience included [an impactful semester away](#) with the Williams-Mystic Coastal and Ocean Studies Program.

In fact, after hands-on work as a crew member aboard the program's tall ship, Filiaggi took a job as a fisheries observer for scallop fishing vessels in conjunction with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Crushed, he had to quit after experiencing a severe asthma attack triggered by poor air quality aboard.

Weighing his future options during the pandemic, Filiaggi realized he could still dedicate his career to protecting the natural environment by pivoting to become a lawyer. He took the LSAT and applied to schools almost immediately.

"I attended an admitted students day at RWU Law and spoke with Dean Michael Donnelly-Boylen," Filiaggi said. "I was shaking. After three years of searching, I knew I had found where I needed to be and where I would be taught what I needed to learn."



Imagining himself working as an attorney for NOAA—where he interned for the Alaska Section of their Office of General Counsel—at a firm practicing environmental law, a nonprofit organization, or another government agency in the future, Filiaggi was drawn in by the [JD/MMA program](#). Through this partnership between RWU Law and his alma mater, the University of Rhode Island, he would gain measurable expertise in environmental policy.

At RWU Law, Filiaggi continuously seeks out opportunities for advocacy and representation. He's facilitated RWU Law panels on gender diversity and the law as well as desegregation in Rhode Island. This Fall, he'll step into the roles of Honor Board Chair and teaching assistant.

"I love RWU Law's focus on supporting local communities through pro bono work," he explained.

In 2023, he worked as a legal intern at the Rhode Island Center for Justice, where he joined the housing team's eviction defense practice and advised individuals in poor living conditions.

"The cases didn't always have a happy ending, but I was able to observe what a big difference having an attorney there made in people's lives and why it's so important for people to have access to legal representation," Filiaggi said. Joining the equitable pursuit of justice is exactly why he decided to become a lawyer.