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RWU Law Launches Legal Clinic for Disabled Veterans

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A unique clinical collaboration pairs Rhode Island law students with seasoned attorneys to provide free legal services for military veterans seeking disability benefits



By: Public Affairs Staff
November 2, 2015

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – An important new clinical initiative at [Roger Williams University School of Law](#) offers renewed hope to military veterans whose applications for disability benefits have been denied and who can't afford to appeal the decision.

In this unique collaboration, law students in the Veterans Disability Appeals Field Clinic will work in the offices of [Chisholm, Chisholm & Kilpatrick](#), one of the nation's leading veterans disability law firms, located in downtown Providence.

"The launch of this clinic is another exciting development for the law school and for Roger Williams University as a whole," said RWU Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky. "We aim to serve society while we are educating our students – and no group is more deserving of assistance than those who have been disabled as a result of military service."



Under court rules permitting law students to engage in limited, supervised legal practice, RWU Law students will be assigned to represent military veterans whose applications for disability benefits have been denied and will pursue their administrative appeals in the [U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims](#) (CAVC).

“This program will pair the students with veterans who need assistance securing the benefits that they have earned,” said Zachary M. Stolz, a partner at Chisholm, Chisholm & Kilpatrick, and national expert in Veterans Court appeals. “This RWU Law Clinic will provide students with hands-on experience in our federal court system, while also providing necessary legal services to our local veterans’ community.”

In this unique clinical setting, law students will perform record reviews, identify relevant evidence, draft legal memoranda in preparation for pre-briefing conferences with the Office of General Counsel for the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#) and with the Central Legal Staff of the CAVC, participate in pre-briefing conferences to discuss the appeal and potentially negotiate a resolution of the appeal, participate in a mock argument addressing legal issues before the CAVC and, when appropriate, argue an appeal before the CAVC. All of the casework will be supervised by seasoned veterans disability attorneys at the firm.

Professor Andrew Horwitz, RWU Law dean of experiential learning and director of clinical programs, notes that the “field clinic” model opens important new educational possibilities.

“We are very excited about this new model for experiential education, which is a blend of our in-house clinic approach and our traditional externship approach,” Horwitz noted. “This allows us to draw upon the expertise of seasoned attorneys in the field while at the same time incorporating the teacher/mentor relationship that is the key to clinical education. The placement of the program inside a law firm gives our students the added bonus of exposure to the inner workings of law firm practice. We have created an exceptional educational environment, while at the same time providing a much-needed public service.”

Dean Yelnosky noted that the Veterans Clinic is also “our first clinic that focuses on appellate work. And without our unique collaboration with Chisholm, Chisholm and Kilpatrick, this clinic would not have made the transition from concept to reality.”

Rhode Island's Congressional delegation lauded the joint effort as essential to protecting those who have sacrificed much for their country.

"We need to ensure our veterans can access the benefits they have earned," said U.S. Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.), a former Army Ranger. "The VA needs to end the backlog for veteran disability claims, and this field clinic can help ensure more Rhode Island veterans get their claims resolved. It's a great public-private partnership between RWU Law and Chisholm, Chisholm and Kilpatrick. Having high-quality, pro bono legal assistance can help our veterans effectively navigate the legal process and ensure their claims are swiftly and effectively adjudicated."

U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) called the clinic "a very helpful resource for our disabled veterans, who have served their country faithfully and should be able to make the best possible case during their VA appeal. The clinic will also help Roger Williams law students hone their skills advocating for important clients. Thank you to RWU Law, Chisholm, Chisholm and Kilpatrick, and all the students who participate in the clinic."

U.S. Rep. Jim Langevin (D-R.I., Second District), a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, stressed the acute need for such legal services.

"The brave men and women who serve our country sacrifice so much, and they deserve our unconditional support when they return home," Rep. Langevin said. "I applaud this legal clinic for advocating on behalf of disabled veterans to ensure they receive the benefits to which they are entitled. My office works with veterans every day to help them navigate the VA and benefits process, and this clinic will provide another layer of protection to ensure our veterans are taken care of."

Today's announcement comes just weeks after the University unveiled [Roger's Revolution](#) – a bold new initiative to make a significant difference in Rhode Island's economic future while equipping students with the experiences and skills that today's employers demand.

"Roger's Revolution is an ambitious effort to put forth tangible goals with the collective force of the entire University – students, faculty and staff – to enact meaningful change for the state of Rhode Island and beyond," explained RWU President Donald J. Farish. "And it all stems from our bold new core purpose: to serve society through engaged teaching and learning."