

DCBA BRIEF

The Journal of the DuPage County Bar Association



Chief Judge Diane Wood of the
Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals
Keynote Speaker at Law Day

Volume 29, Issue 9
May 2017

“Catch-All Clinic” Answers Needs of Students and Community

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John Marshall Law School's Pro Bono Program & Clinic

John Marshall Law School is known for its generosity in providing free legal services to its community at-large. With programs like the Fair Housing Legal Support Center & Clinic, the Domestic Violence Clinic and the Business Enterprise Law Clinic, people can find the legal help they need and the students of JMLS gain valuable hands-on experience in working with clients under the guidance and direction of their law professors and supervising attorneys.

In recent years, it became apparent to administrators and professors at JMLS, that there was a *pro bono* niche that needed filling. Calls were consistently coming into the “help line” relating to topics outside the areas of specialty covered by JMLS’s existing legal clinics. In 2009, a new program and clinic targeting a broader base of needs was formed. Known as the *Pro Bono Program & Clinic*, it presently fields more than 1000 calls a year (about 100 calls a month) and in 2016, its students, faculty and supporters have actively assisted over 200 callers.

There are a total of nine (9) community legal programs and clinics available through JMLS. The *Pro Bono Program & Clinic* (PBPC), according to Professor **Damian Ortiz**, will refer on cases relating to family law, bankruptcy, medical malpractice, personal injury, tax matters, or patent/trademark. Though not exclusive, typical areas of representation that Professor Ortiz’s program assists with include

expungements, name changes, evictions, DUIs, criminal misdemeanors, felonies, prisoner rights, foreclosure defense, small claims and all types of appeals.

The process is simple, though thorough. With every call received, a student conducts a detailed in-take on the potential case. The student then drafts a memorandum for the Review Committee which decides whether the case will be accepted, passed onto another JMLS clinic, or is sent elsewhere. The Review Committee has four acceptance criteria: the merit of the case; the need of the client; whether the PBPC, given its resources and expertise of personnel, can handle the case effectively; and the existing case load of the Program.

The PBPC has no financial restrictions, residency or jurisdictional requirements. Clients of means, and those without, are welcome to contact the PBPC. The Program proudly boasts of being “open to all issues and all people”. However, in certain instances, if it is determined that a client has the financial resources, that client would be asked to cover nominal case expenses.

Partnering with Chicago law firms large and small has helped meet some of the resource restrictions the PBPC might otherwise face. On the flip side, the law firms are able to meet their *pro bono* requirements and their new associates receive valuable legal training. In other instances, private practice attorneys who were looking for additional support on complex matters or document heavy

cases have reached out and received assistance from students in the Program. Presently, students of the PBPC are assisting on two Civil Rights cases and 4th Amendment litigation, among a variety of other topics.

The Program is available to second and third year law students and typically accommodates 30 students per semester. Due to popular demand of both students and the community, the Program stretched its resources this semester and added 10 more students. Professor Ortiz explains that, “we do not actively market the *Pro Bono Program & Clinic*; our students and clients do that for us”.

In addition to the practical experience the Program’s law students receive in managing clients, conducting research and investigation of cases, Professor Ortiz states that there is special emphasis on legal writing skills and professionalism. From in-take memos, through pleadings and motion practice, to trial, the students receive necessary, constructive instruction from their professors and supervising attorneys. Professor Ortiz states, “(o)ur goal is to provide the student with the essential tools, knowledge and practical skills necessary for them to be honorable members of the legal profession.”

For more information on the *Pro Bono Program & Clinic* and the eight other community legal clinics available through the John Marshall Law School, please visit them at <http://www.jmls.edu/clinics/>. □