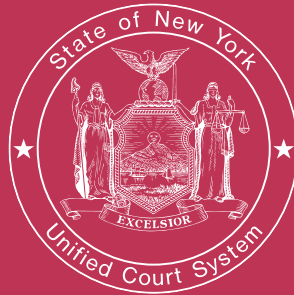


NEW YORK STATE PERMANENT COMMISSION ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO SCHOOL OF LAW,
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

THE LAW SCHOOL
INVOLVEMENT WORKING GROUP



ELEVENTH ANNUAL
LAW SCHOOL
CONFERENCE

CULTIVATING CIVIL LEGAL JUSTICE LEADERS TO
ADDRESS THE STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES OF
POVERTY, INEQUALITY, AND INJUSTICE

REPORT ON THE MARCH 8, 2023
LAW SCHOOL ACCESS TO JUSTICE VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 2023

2023 Law School Conference Planning Committee

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I. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Law Schools

1. Cultivate Civil Legal Justice Leaders

Law schools should ensure that students are encouraged and supported to pursue social justice and public interest work that will serve to expand access to justice. Offering law students varied and multiple opportunities to engage in public interest work both through their school and via other avenues is foundational to cultivating civil legal justice advocates and leaders.

- Access-to-justice focused seminars and opportunities for experiential learning and practical engagement, such as providing supervised informational assistance, should be available to all students, including first year students.
- Experiential learning programs, critical to developing cross-cultural competencies and understanding the root causes of structural inequities, should continue to be expanded, particularly involving housing and family matters.
- Forums with civil legal services providers, courts, government agencies, and other experts should be offered and expanded to expose law students to opportunities and public interest career paths.
- Law schools should consider partnerships with Legal Hand and other similar efforts to operate virtual call-in centers where law students, trained and supervised by a lawyer, can volunteer to provide informational assistance and referrals to community members experiencing essentials of life challenges.
- Law schools should offer programming on trauma-informed lawyering and vicarious trauma to address the harms experienced by clients and practitioners alike.
- Law schools and student groups should engage in programming with college, high school, and middle school students to foster a public interest mindset and pipeline to the profession.
- Law schools should work with other interested parties on assessing and improving the financial realities of choosing a public interest career over other options.

2. Integrate Instruction on the Use of Artificial Intelligence to Expand Access to justice Across the Curriculum

- Artificial Intelligence and technology tools will continue to transform the practice of law and delivery of legal services. Law schools should equip students with foundational knowledge to effectively and ethically use these platforms to expand access to justice as well as guard against its misuse.
- Law schools should consider the viability of a legal tech hub, whether statewide or regional, where student projects designed to improve access to justice can be reviewed and tested by legal services providers.

3. Sustain the Pipeline for Housing Justice Leaders

- Law schools should continue to integrate housing justice and related issues throughout the curriculum.
- Law schools should consider adopting courses focused solely on housing justice and related issues and promote housing-based experiential learning opportunities for all students.
- Law schools should continue to support and provide training for law students to engage with tenant organizers, including supporting law students and organizers who experience vicarious trauma.
- Law schools should continue to strengthen partnerships with community-based organizations and other legal services providers to strengthen access-to-justice collaborations in light of the eviction crisis facing New York.

B. Court System

1. Recognize Supervised Informational Assistance on Law-Related Issues Delivered by Law Students at Legal Hand Call-In Centers as Eligible Pro Bono Service Under the 50-Hour Pro Bono Bar Admission Requirement

- Law student pro bono service at Legal Hand Call-In Centers, serving Albany, Nassau, Schenectady, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties, in tandem with a guided externship or course, or as volunteer (non-credit) service hours, supervised by a Center Attorney, should be formally recognized as qualifying law-related service for the New York State 50-hour pro bono requirement for bar admission. This recognition would comport with qualification for pro bono credit in satisfaction of the 50-hour requirement granted to law student volunteers at LiveHelpNY.

- Legal Hand and other similar centers and programs should be supported and expanded by the access-to-justice community.

2. Adjust the Pro Bono Scholars Program timetable for completion of hours

- Based on the years of experience with New York’s Pro Bono Scholars Program and the recommendation from the 2022 Law School Conference, the Pro Bono Scholars Program should allow for some qualifying hours to be completed in the fall semester in advance of the February bar exam.
- Law schools should be encouraged to offer a minimum one-week training and orientation in collaboration with legal service providers in the fall semester that would count toward the required program hours. This one-week fall training could address client interviewing, trauma-informed lawyering, and wellness, or other local access to justice issues appropriate to a particular placement.

II. THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

On March 8, 2023, the New York State Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, in partnership with University at Buffalo School of Law, State University of New York (Buffalo Law School) convened the 11th Annual Law School Conference.¹ The Conference was established to promote dialogue and collaborations among New York’s 15 law schools, civil legal services organizations, and community stakeholders, including the courts, to expand access to justice. Since the first Conference, a core theme has been how best to educate and engage law students in the work to close the justice gap.

The 2023 Law School Conference Planning Committee designed the conference in recognition that a great proportion of students enter law school with the intent to effect societal change, work to correct injustice and help people experiencing challenges to the essentials of life. Drawing from Professor William Quigley’s 2007 article, “Letter to a Law Student Interested in Social Justice,” the Planning Committee seized on the idea of a roundtable encouraging students—and legal services practitioners—not to lose sight of these goals. They planned based on knowledge that cultivating initial predilections and highlighting the needs of the greater community in the face of competing school and market pressures can be keys to cultivating the next generation of civil justice leaders. The Conference Roundtable and Work Group panelists explored the influences of law school education and access-to-justice centered practice that foster a commitment to public interest work. A plenary discussion was added to spotlight some of the late-breaking impacts and challenges presented by the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technology tools to expand access to justice.

The Conference opened with remarks from Permanent Commission Chair Helaine M. Barnett, who welcomed the 248 participants from across the state and country, including law students, Pro Bono Scholars, deans, faculty, administrators, judges, court employees, directors and staff of legal services organizations, and practitioners, to the virtual Conference. The Chair noted that by holding the Conference in March this year, law students played an active role in the planning process and had an increased ability to serve as presenters in nearly every session. This provided fresh perspectives and supported the underlying objective of the Conference that law schools infuse access to justice across the curriculum.

In his remarks, New York State Acting Chief Judge Anthony Cannataro applauded the law schools and legal services community for their impactful efforts to expand access to

¹ The Conference agenda, session recordings, transcripts and other materials are posted on the Permanent Commission’s website at <https://ww2.nycourts.gov/accesstojusticecommission/lis2023>.

essential legal services for low-income New Yorkers. With New York's historic investment of over \$100 million in dedicated civil legal services funding and the myriad access-to-justice initiatives undertaken by law schools, legal service organizations, the courts and bar associations, the Acting Chief Judge remarked that the Conference, focusing on cultivating civil justice leaders, could not be timelier. The Acting Chief Judge noted that this annual Conference demonstrates New York's strong commitment to training, preparing, and encouraging new generations of lawyers to take up the challenge to ensure access to justice.

Acting Chief Judge Cannataro stated there has been progress in expanding access to justice. Initiatives, such as this Conference, maintain a spotlight on the role of law schools and students in expanding access to justice, and produce recommendations for moving forward. Yet this progress has been tempered, he noted, by the profound toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on the financial, emotional, physical, and mental health of New Yorkers. He highlighted the undeniable need for civil legal assistance by low-income and disadvantaged populations has increased, especially in essentials of life courts adjudicating housing disputes and sensitive legal matters involving children and families. He pointed to the responsibility of the legal community to ameliorate the structural challenges that public interest attorneys face. The Acting Chief Judge indicated that the Conference discussions can inform this work, which in turn will strengthen the pipeline to public interest law and define the next generation of civil justice leaders.

Next, Buffalo Law School Dean, Aviva Abramovsky, spoke, focusing on the law school's access-to-justice mission. Dean Abramovsky articulated the moral responsibility of Buffalo Law School, as a public institution, to address disparities in the community and to work with community partners to solve problems and promote positive change. She highlighted the exceptional access-to-justice work of the school's clinical programs, tackling issues ranging from environmental advocacy to civil rights to domestic violence, while training the next generation of great justice leaders and practitioners. Last year alone, Buffalo Law School students provided more than 41,000 hours of pro bono service through clinics, externships, practicum courses, and pro bono programs. The impact of those experiences for both the students and the communities they serve is life changing, and often leads to a lifetime of service. Dean Abramovsky underscored how Buffalo Law School graduates use their law school education for the betterment of society, many becoming civil justice leaders and all remaining loyal to the school's mission to expand to access to justice. She closed by stressing that law schools have a critical role in cultivating civil justice leaders and practitioners.

A. Keynote Roundtable: Cultivating Civil Legal Justice Leaders to Address the Structural Challenges of Poverty, Injustice, and Inequality

Moderator:

Steven Banks, Special Counsel, Pro Bono, Paul, Weiss, Rifkin, Wharton & Garrison, LLP

Participants:

Saima Akhtar, Senior Attorney, National Center for Law and Economic Justice

Kim Diana Connolly, Professor of Law and Vice Dean for Advocacy and Experiential Education, Buffalo Law School

Hon. Craig D. Hannah, New York State Supreme Court Justice, Eighth Judicial District

Adrian Neil, General Counsel, Rochester City School District, Department of Law

Shivani Parikh, Fordham University School of Law, Class of 2024

Call to Action:

William P. Quigley, Clinical Professor of Law Emeritus, Loyola University New Orleans, College of Law

Steven Banks posed a series of questions to the panelists designed to elicit the foundational principles that define their commitment to close the justice gap, the types of skills and knowledge useful to advance a public interest career, and how to sustain a commitment to pro bono service.

Without exception, expanding access to justice and equalizing opportunities is the defining factor of all the panelists' legal pursuits. Judge Craig Hannah noted his motivation comes from his desire to help people resolve challenges and connect them with services and resources. Shivani Parikh identified her commitment to advance civil rights and racial justice for South Asians, particularly taxi drivers. Professor Kim Diana Connolly pointed to the reflections of her clinical students as her motivation and inspiration for the profession and read out loud some excerpts. Finally, Adrian Neil, echoing Judge Hannah, remarked on the position of privilege lawyers hold and their professional responsibility to help those in need access assistance and resources.

Uniformly, the panelists stressed the significance of experiences outside the classroom in shaping their public interest careers. It was typically the clinical, experiential, or externship programming in law school that provided the connection to the legal services community, mentorship, and chance to embrace the life changing work. Classes in poverty law and simulations are of immense value. Professor Connolly pointed out that these experiences are integral to professional identity formation and in exposing students to uncover and reflect on bias and racism realities that they can work to overcome. Similarly, experiential opportunities help students develop cultural humility that will serve them well in practice.

This comports with the new requisites of ABA Standard 303(c) that requires law schools to provide instruction on bias, racism, and cross-cultural competency.

Saima Akhtar credited her legal education so far for equipping her with the tools to create systems change in her law reform work and litigation. Ms. Akhtar emphasized that mastering civil procedure, jurisdictional rules, and remedies is crucial. Ms. Akhtar stressed the need for deeper conversation with students and colleagues to foster a certain mindset for the work and to promote strategic and collaborative objectives. She indicated a supportive work environment is also key to nurture civil justice leaders and sustain practitioners.

Equally important is understanding the mindset and experience of the clients, and the ability to be empathic. Clients are often in crisis and managing their trauma is often part of the lawyering job.

Professor William P. Quigley capped off the Roundtable with a strong “Call to Action”, remarking that the panel discussion conveyed the need for collaborative work to close the justice gap and called on the power of passionate advocates to create an equitable and accessible justice system. He suggested it starts with forums like this, where the power of just a few people inspires and encourages law students – and others – to stake their claim, disrupt the status quo and transform our justice system.

B. Plenary Panel: Artificial Intelligence and Access to Justice: Challenges, Opportunities and Ethics

Moderator:

Raymond H. Brescia, Hon. Harold R. Tyler Chair in Law and Technology and Professor of Law, Albany Law School

Panelists:

Renee Danser, Associate Director, Research and Strategic Partnerships, Access to Justice Lab, Harvard Law School

Sateesh Nori, Executive Director, JustFix

Andrew M. Perlman, Dean and Professor of Law, Suffolk University Law School

Elizabeth Tran, Legal Services Director, Houston Volunteer Lawyers

Just as the news about the next iteration of ChatGPT was breaking, the Conference Plenary Panel addressed the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on access to justice. For decades, lawyers have been using technology to expand and streamline the legal services delivery network, and improve efficiencies and outcomes for lawyers, courts, and litigants. By necessity, the pandemic accelerated the use of technology. In keeping with the

Conference theme, the panel described how they integrated AI into their work to showcase the abundant opportunities for law students and lawyers to design innovative tools and platforms to expand access to justice.

Professor Ray Brescia stated that programs using AI often take the human out of the equation by analyzing and contextualizing data to offer a solution or trigger other actions. A subset of AI is machine learning, where AI uses algorithms to automatically glean insights and recognize patterns from data to make decisions. Another type of AI is a type of machine learning that uses large neural networks, functioning much like a human brain, to logically analyze data and to recognize complex patterns. Finally, there is generative AI, like ChatGPT, that produces various content such as text, imagery, audio, and synthetic data.

As demand for legal services soared during the pandemic, Elizabeth Tran created a universal intake screening tool to determine client eligibility and the level of services needed, resulting in the delivery of more meaningful and effective assistance and referrals to community members. As this intake tool was integrated into practice, Ms. Tran recognized the opportunity for the Texas legal services community and social services network that a coordinated access network would holistically serve individuals in need, broadly improving access and services.

Technology is vital to the flow and delivery of information. Automating information related to legal processes, through “Do It Yourself” (DIY) forms and Know Your Rights (KYR) programs, has increased access. Sateesh Nori discussed a tool created by JustFix, using very basic AI, that enables tenants to advocate for essential repairs before going to court. Individuals confronting challenges to housing can use tools created by JustFix and other organizations to document problems and identify defenses.

Operationally, the machine learning components of AI can evaluate the impact of legal service organizations’ programs and initiatives on the individuals served and in the community. For example, have there been improvements to health equity? Have employability rates increased for clients served? Have people overcome poverty? Renee Danser explained how her Lab uses large data sets from courts, government agencies, and community surveys to measure not just individual outcomes but how communities are changing and prospering because of the interaction with services. Ms. Danser stressed the importance of reviewing data with a multidisciplinary team—data and statistical analysts, code writers, lawyers, people with lived experience and local subject matter experts—to review the records to understand them from a holistic perspective.

Dean Andrew Perlman asserted that the best use of AI is when AI and lawyers work together to generate work products and information. Dean Perlman credits Suffolk's Legal Innovation and Technology Institute with this type of innovative work that delivers community legal services. While it is routinely in use now, the Institute propelled the use of automated plain language legal documents and document assembly tools. Working in close coordination with Massachusetts and other courts, the Institute facilitated easy access to a suite of automated legal documents that self-represented individuals can use in less complex matters.

Dean Perlman cautioned users to remember the duty of confidentiality when using generative AI and consider instances when the use of AI can run afoul of unauthorized practice of law strictures or reach beyond the informational assistance permitted by non-lawyers.

Mr. Nori encouraged law students to take advantage of experiential learning opportunities and to work in a legal services organization. Armed with first-hand knowledge from these experiences, students could identify and develop the work-flow charts that can be converted into tech tools to expand access to justice. To this end, Dean Perlman projected that instruction across the law school curriculum, from legal research and writing to every doctrinal course must evolve. The types of skills needed for clinical work will change. Law schools must adjust their education to the emerging marketplace, not only what employers expect in demand, but what the public expects.

C. Work Group Sessions

Following the Plenary Session, Conference participants were invited to join one of four work group sessions. Session coordinators prepared brief reports with recommendations and/or action steps for the Commission's consideration.

1. How Law Schools Can Cultivate the Housing Justice Leaders of Tomorrow, Who Will Help Build Tenant Power and Attack Structural Challenges

Coordinators:

Grace Andriette, Senior Supervising Attorney, Housing Unit, Neighborhood Legal Services
William J. Niebel, Tenants Advocacy Attorney & Adjunct Professor of Law; Director of Tenants Advocacy Practicum; Cornell Law School

Panelists:

Malcolm Drenttel, Cornell Law School, Class of 2025

Alan Eiland, Fordham University School of Law, Class of 2024
Carolyn Headlam, Founding Member, Ithaca Housing Collective
Yusong Jin, Tenants Advocacy Fellow, Cornell Law School
Jennifer Seidman, Cornell Law School, Class of 2023

Work Group Description and Overview of Discussion:

The Work Group session explored the role of law schools in supporting and training the tenant advocates of tomorrow, and the role law students may play in working to challenge the inequities that create housing instability in poor communities and communities of color. The impact of the housing affordability crisis, the digital divide, structural racism, as well as potential solutions, including the role of virtual proceedings, were all discussed by a diverse panel composed of law students, tenant advocates, and organizers.

The law students on the panel confirmed that their interest in access to justice was impacted by exposure to these issues and internship opportunities in law school. They recommended an increase in classes about actual practice and substantive housing law, with an overt focus on intersectionality issues. Dedicated, full-time clinical instructors are crucial to maximize the learning experience and help demonstrate the efficacy of a career providing civil legal services. Public interest organizations should start recruiting early in the second year to compete with law firms.

Recommendations from the Work Group:

To strengthen and grow the pipeline for the housing justice leaders of tomorrow, law schools must continue to integrate housing justice throughout the curriculum, consider adopting courses focused solely on housing justice, and promote housing-based experiential learning opportunities.

Instruction on housing law procedure and defenses, the impacts of redlining, gentrification, right to counsel measures, critical race theory, and the digital divide in the time of virtual courts should be required for every student. Ideally, law schools should have full-time faculty who teach this coursework. The earlier in law school that students are exposed to housing justice issues, through experiential learning, including the provision of informational services, the more likely they are to join the access to housing justice pipeline.

Law schools should continue to support and provide training for law students to engage with tenant organizers, including supporting law students and organizers who experience vicarious trauma.

There can be no comprehensive housing justice without tenant organizers. Law students are often tenants while in school, creating the opportunity to collaborate with tenant organizers, as early as their first year (and even to organize themselves). Specifically, they can work with organizers to address the structural barriers that tenants face. Law students can provide support by doing outreach and door-knocking to connect tenants with resources to address housing unaffordability, creating know-your-rights resources, providing transportation to court, and helping to bridge the digital divide by assisting tenants with appearing virtually in court. Through such collaborations, law students can build tenant power and work to attack structural barriers.

2. Legal Knowledge, Cultural Competency and Life Experience through Sustained Community Pro Bono Engagement

Coordinators/Moderators:

Elyse Diamond, Director, Public Interest Law Center and Adjunct Professor of Law, Pace Law School

Patricia Malone, Legal Director for New York Justice Initiatives, ProBonoNet

Panelists:

Bethany Cereo, Center Attorney, Legal Hand Call-In Center, Albany-Schenectady Counties, Center for Community Justice

Stephanie Costa, Center Attorney, Legal Hand Call-In Center, Westchester County, Pace Law School

Hon. Fern A. Fisher, Center Attorney, Legal Hand Call-In Center, Nassau-Suffolk Counties; Sassower Distinguished Visiting Professor of Law, Visiting Associate Professor, Hofstra Law School

Wantee Ramkaran, Program Manager for New York Justice Initiatives, ProBonoNet

Nicole Wong, Associate, Paul Hastings LLP; Class of 2022 and Pro Bono Scholar, Hofstra Law School

Work Group Description:

The Work Group explored innovative co-curricular law school access-to-justice pro bono and broader community engagement projects, such as Legal Hand Call-In Centers, LiveHelpNY and the Pro Bono Scholars Program, discussing the unique enrichment and benefits these programs can bring to legal institutions and law students.

Overview of Work Group Discussion:

Pro bono service is a bedrock value of the New York bar and critical to helping efforts to close New York's justice gap. In 2012, the Court of Appeals adopted a 50-hour pro bono

service requirement for bar admission² to inculcate a lifelong commitment, particularly to serve individuals in need. New York's 15 law schools developed and strengthened pro bono service programs, externships, internships, and other experiential offerings to facilitate satisfaction of this requirement.³ In 2014, the Pro Bono Scholars Program was established to offer third year students the opportunity to spend their last semester in a pro bono placement for law school credit, to serve people in need, furthering the Program's goals of expanding access to justice and cultivating a culture of pro bono service.⁴

The Work Group discussion identified the provision of legal information by trained and supervised law students as a crucial pro bono service that offers students practical experience helping individuals in need, while learning substantive law and procedure and developing skills and cultural competencies. This type of information assistance is invaluable to expand meaningful access to justice. The Work Group recommends that law student pro bono hours served at Legal Hand Call-In Centers be formally deemed to qualify for the New York State 50-hour pro bono bar admission requirement analogous to the qualification for pro bono service at LiveHelpNY that are accepted as qualifying by the Appellate Departments in the admission process.

In the virtual legal informational service model, trained and supervised law student volunteers assist community members navigate legal and nonlegal resources to address their issues and identify legal referral help when necessary. Virtual informational services delivered by law student volunteers at Legal Hand Call-In Centers and LiveHelpNY empower community members with an understanding of their rights and options to best address their issues. Both models may avert or reduce court action through self-help and direction to legal and nonlegal resources and services.

When Legal Hand launched in 2015 as neighborhood storefront centers, it relied on trained volunteer community members, under the supervision of a lawyer, to provide informational assistance to fellow community members confronting essentials of life challenges in the hope of avoiding court action. As a result of the pandemic, Legal Hand transitioned to a virtual model and partnered with two law schools, the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University (Hofstra Law School) to serve Nassau and Suffolk Counties, and the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University (Pace Law School) to serve Westchester County, as well as a service organization, the Center for Community Justice, serving Albany and Schenectady Counties. Both Professor Elyse Diamond and Judge Fern Fisher expressed the important contribution their law schools are making to

² Rules of Ct of Appeals (22 NYCRR) § 520.

³ Rules of Ct of Appeals (22 NYCRR) § 520.16.

⁴ Rules of Ct of Appeals (22 NYCRR) § 520.17.

their communities in hosting the Centers. The Centers serve as a resource for individuals in need and as advocates on policy and social issues. At all three Centers, both law students and community members may serve alongside one another as volunteers, creating a deep understanding of community issues and the untoward consequences of the justice gap.

Professor Diamond and Judge Fisher described how these partnerships engage many law students in pro bono access-to-justice work, under the supervision of a lawyer, often in complement with a related access-to-justice instructional seminar, externship, or course during the academic year (but also for some law students as a volunteer pro bono service activity). Bethany Cereo emphasized the significance of a virtual pro bono placement for students with limited financial resources who may be unable to travel to unpaid clinical or public service engagements. In many cases, the relative ease of accessing a virtual platform has similar demonstrable benefits for individuals seeking services.

Judge Fisher reported that in the weeks immediately preceding the Conference, law students at the Nassau-Suffolk Legal Hand Call-In Center fielded inquiries related to housing, eviction, foreclosure, custody, child support, divorce, domestic violence, consumer debt, trusts and estates, jurisdiction, and immigration. To meaningfully respond, Judge Fisher and Professor Diamond related that students engage in legal issue spotting, legal resource research, and building and utilizing critical communication skills so they can organize, explain, and provide information back to those seeking assistance. Wantee Ramkaran, a 2020 Pro Bono Scholar, noted that law student volunteers at LiveHelpNY similarly provide legal information in plain language by web chat with virtual visitors. Ms. Ramkaran stated that like her experience as a student volunteer at LiveHelpNY, the students gain practical skills and develop empathy, which both humanizes the practice of law, and contextualizes their classroom instruction.

Stephanie Costa noted the array of issues presented in such settings offers law students perspectives into all areas of the law and helps develop their cultural competency. Significantly, this provides the law students with an understanding of the interconnection of legal and social services issues confronting low-to-moderate income people, including barriers to access, such as English language proficiency or disability. Nicole Wong remarked that pro bono service, even delivered virtually, bridges gaps for the individuals served and imbued her with cultural humility, forever changing her perspective.

The FAQs published under New York’s Pro Bono Requirement⁵ expressly define qualifying work tasks as those which are “law-related” and emphasize that “the primary purpose of the Pro Bono Requirement is to enhance the provision of legal resources available to persons who would otherwise not be able to access or afford legal assistance [and work to achieve this objective should be “pro bono work with programs or entities that aim to improve access to justice, are engaged in the representation of low-income or disadvantaged individuals or provide government services in furtherance of these objectives.”⁶ Moreover, qualifying work expressly includes, among other work, “[l]aw school-sponsored projects or programs that serve the poor or disadvantaged, provided the work is law-related and supervised in compliance with the Pro Bono Requirement”⁷ as well as “[l]aw-related” work “serving the poor or disadvantaged or otherwise promoting access to justice.”⁸

Given that the scope of the legal informational services provided by law students at Legal Hand Call-In Centers falls squarely within qualifying work as outlined in the FAQs and is analogous to the other qualifying public interest internship placements as well as in pro bono volunteer work at LiveHelpNY, the Work Group recommends that there is a formal confirmation that law student Legal Hand Call-In Center pro bono service satisfies the 50-hour bar admission requirement.

Recommendations from the Work Group:

Recognize supervised informational assistance on law-related issues delivered by law students at Legal Hand Centers as eligible pro bono service under the 50-hour pro bono bar admission requirement.

Law student pro bono service at Legal Hand Call-In Centers, serving Albany, Nassau, Schenectady, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties, in tandem with a guided externship or course or as volunteer service hours, supervised by a Center Attorney, should be formally recognized as qualifying law-related service for the New York State 50-hour pro bono requirement for bar admission. This recognition would comport with qualification for pro bono credit in satisfaction of the 50-hour requirement granted to law student volunteers at LiveHelpNY.

⁵ New York State Bar Admission: Pro Bono Requirement FAQs, https://ww2.nycourts.gov/sites/default/files/document/files/2018-07/FAQsBarAdmission_0.pdf.

⁶ New York State Bar Admission: Pro Bono Requirement FAQs, FAQ 11(a).

⁷ *Id.*, FAQ 12(c).

⁸ *Id.*, FAQ 12(d)(iii).

Promote forums and dialogue to educate students about pro bono and related enriching community public service opportunities and public service careers.

Law schools should continue to engage with legal and social services stakeholders and convene public interest resource events that expose students to the range of pro bono, public service and public interest pathways for work that expands access to justice, corrects societal inequities and serves communities in need.

3. Strengthening and Sustaining Pathways for Public Service and Public Interest Lawyers: Law School Support for Students and for the Pipeline to the Legal Profession

Coordinator:

Adrian Neil, General Counsel, Rochester City School District, Department of Law

Panelists:

Katie Blum, Staff Attorney, Civil Rights Unit, Empire Justice Center

Hon. Craig D. Hannah, New York State Supreme Court Justice, Eighth Judicial District

Tina Monshipour Foster, Executive Director, JustCause

Langston McFadden, Partner, Law Offices of Pullano & Farrow

Analiene Vasciannie, Buffalo Law School, Class of 2024

Work Group Description:

There is much discussion of the demand for legal services lawyers and the shortage of lawyers to fill open positions at legal services organizations. To address this stark reality and its impact on access to justice, the Work Group considered ways law schools and the bar could promote pathways to public interest and public service careers.

Overview of Work Group Discussion:

For Katie Blum, her law school pro bono service and clinical work confirmed that access to justice is uneven. Like Analiene Vasciannie, Ms. Blum found the first-year doctrinal curriculum disconnected from her public interest expectations. As a 2L, Ms. Vasciannie's seminars and community involvement reinforced her goal to pursue access-to-justice work that will impact people directly. Ms. Blum and Ms. Vasciannie both described working alongside individuals committed to public interest work as affirming, crediting their professors and supervisors for their mentorship.

Tina Monshipour Foster is passionate about pro bono service. While in private practice, she was engaged in pro bono projects. Now, she leads a not-for-profit organization that leverages the pro bono services of the local bar to fill legal services gaps in the community. Ms. Foster stressed the significant role of pro bono partnerships with the private bar to

dismantle inequitable structures and systems. Ms. Foster pointed to the 50-hour bar admission requirement as valuable for students to learn about the impact of pro bono service on expanding access to justice.

As a private practitioner, Langston McFadden related that his pro bono legal work enables him to articulate the needs of those less fortunate, lift people out of untenable situations, and effect position change. He points to his law school education and his own life experiences with cultivating his commitment to help community members in need.

Both Ms. Foster and Mr. McFadden related that the compensation in private practice was determinative of their jobs following law school graduation. The panelists bemoaned the high cost of law school and acknowledged how debt can derail the best intentions to pursue a public service or public interest pathway. The panelists anticipated that loan forgiveness programs for public interest or public service work could incentivize graduates. The Work Group noted that the high cost of legal education can, in the first instance, be an obstacle and suggested that law schools consider ways to reduce costs or provide increased financial awards. Relatedly, the Work Group noted the disparity in wages for public interest lawyers as compared to government and private lawyers as a persistent issue that needs to be examined.

The panelists recognized the importance of a support network, particularly for first generation law students, that includes peers and mentors, who could be alumni and/or bar association members. The pressures and attention students – and practitioners – receive to be role models or examples can be burdensome. Judge Hannah indicated that affirmation demonstrating a student is deserving of their place in law school and as a member of the bar cannot be understated. Likewise, attention to work/life balance and wellness is imperative.

The Work Group suggested that law schools increase programming on wellness issues, including vicarious trauma. As Judge Hannah indicated, the realities of public interest work are hard and can be unsettling. Mr. McFadden noted that it is possible to help others and be true to your professional goals. This underscores the value of pro bono service and pro bono partnerships with the private bar.

Recommendations from the Work Group:

Increase opportunities for experiential learning to strengthen pathways to public interest and public service work.

- Experiential learning opportunities, such as clinics, externships, clerkships, and pro bono service have a demonstrated impact on career choice. To strengthen and expand the pipeline to legal services work, law schools should increase flexibility in the law school curriculum to maximize experiential learning,

particularly in the first year, to ensure students who enter with a public interest mindset pursue that pathway.

Bolster support networks to sustain law student engagement and foster law student wellness.

- Law students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds (including first generation students), expressed isolation and lack of belonging. Law schools should provide supportive services to ensure student success and wellbeing.
- Law schools can connect students with alumni to provide mentorship and support.
- To address the toll law school and public interest work can take, law schools should expand services and training that promote mental health and wellbeing.

Strengthen the Pipeline to the Legal Profession

- Law schools should connect with students in college, high school, or even earlier, to encourage and build a public interest mindset.
- To ensure more students pursue public interest work, law schools should consider additional ways to defray the high cost of a legal education for students committed to public interest through increased scholarships and support for loan forgiveness programs.

4. Becoming the Next Generation of Family Justice Leaders and Advocates

Coordinator:

Judith G. Olin, Clinical Professor; Director, Family Violence and Women’s Rights Clinic, Buffalo Law School

Panelists:

Elizabeth “Lizzy” Vinal, Staff Attorney, Family Law Unit, Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc.; Class of 2022, Buffalo Law School

Shamira Nawz, Class of 2023, Buffalo Law School

Chanel Powell, Class of 2023, Buffalo Law School

Work Group Description:

The Work Group explored how clinical and experiential programs can define law students’ commitment to pursue public interest work. Offering law students opportunities to engage in public interest work is foundational to cultivating civil legal justice advocates and leaders. The Work Group spotlighted Buffalo Law School’s Family Violence Women’s

Rights Clinic (FVWRC) to illustrate the formative impact of providing access to justice to under-resourced and underrepresented clients, who are often in crisis.

Overview of Work Group Discussion:

The Work Group expressed the importance and positive impact of involving law students in public interest work as early as possible in their law school career. They agreed that promoting law student engagement in public interest work fosters a commitment to pursue access to justice. The Work Group's law student panelists noted that the current 1L curriculum does not explore who the law serves from a public interest perspective nor offer ready outlets for law students to explore public interest work.

The group then explored how "whetting their appetite" through participation in an experiential offering can encourage students to pursue a particular career. Lizzy Vinal pointed to her four semesters in the FVWRC as the basis for her family law career choice; she believes that her clinical experiences formed her professional identity as an attorney. Further, her clinical experiences and instruction provided her with practical skills and competencies, including providing trauma-informed services that she uses in her law practice.

The Work Group discussed increased promotion and expansion of law school based financial incentives for public interest students, including scholarships and fellowships devoted to public interest and loan forgiveness programs for public interest and public service work. Professor Olin indicated that the Buffalo Law School's has a long-supported a summer fellowship program including the student-run Buffalo Public Interest Law Program, which together provides funded summer fellowships for dozens of students working in public interest settings. Offering law students opportunities to engage in public interest work is foundational to cultivating civil legal justice advocates and leaders.

Recommendations of the Work Group:

Increase opportunities for law students to engage in public interest work and foster a commitment to access to justice.

- Law students indicated that experiential and clinical opportunities focused on public interest practice are formative in career choices.
 - Experiential and clinical programs expose students to access-to-justice issues, the advantages of legal representation, and how law can be used as an instrument of change.
- Law schools should promote public interest summer programs that typically include stipends.

- Law schools should promote student engagement in the community to learn about and address access-to-justice issues.
 - Law schools should consider hosting community forums to deepen understanding of needs and gaps in services and how law students can work to address those issues.

D. Closing Session

Matthew Diller, Dean of Fordham University School of Law and Chair of the Permanent Commission's Law School Involvement Working Group, expressed his appreciation to the organizers and planners, remarking on the diversity of perspectives offered at the Conference. True to the Conference theme, Dean Diller stated that it was particularly instructive to hear directly from law students about what it takes to support them on the pathway to become civil legal services practitioners. As in previous Conferences, he noted that the Work Groups highlighted programs and opportunities for students to work directly on access-to-justice issues and partner with organizations in the community to help individuals in tremendous need. He also pointed to the instructive discussion of the opportunities and challenges created by new technologies and AI to expand access to justice.

Dean Diller acknowledged the need for law schools to focus on the kind of mindset and community building necessary to cultivate civil justice leaders and practitioners. This includes providing both academic and emotional resources and fostering an inclusive environment to ensure students are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to pursue access-to-justice work.

He recognized a common theme throughout the Conference—that the curricular material in law schools, particularly in first year doctrinal classes, illustrates the way law is used as a tool by the powerful to reinforce the status quo. In the Work Group sessions, student panelists expressed the disconnect this presented for understanding access-to-justice issues and the nature of public interest practice, where the work will often reinforce the reality that the legal system is inequitable. Yet, Dean Diller asserted, the law is a tool for change and offers hooks and handles to effect meaningful, positive societal change and help individuals avoid tremendous harms. Drawing on legal rules and principles to help people and to improve communities gives law its power. He stated, as lawyers, we must creatively use our tools to ensure access.

Dean Diller then invited representatives from each of the Work Group to briefly report on their sessions and recommendations to expand access to justice which are detailed in this report.

Chair Barnett closed the Conference expressing gratitude for the great effort and thoughtful discussions that will inform recommendations to the Chief Judge on ways law schools can help close the justice gap and welcomed suggestions for themes for next year's conference.