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Growing the Clinics

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Growing the clinics

Powered by major new grants, the School of Law's clinical education program is expanding its reach in serving the community. Our students will provide critical legal counsel to two vital groups of people: women at risk of lethal family violence, and military veterans and active service members.

New funding to provide legal help to women at high risk of violence

Students in the Family Violence and Women's Rights Clinic will step up their efforts to provide legal help for women in perilous home situations, with the support of a major new grant.

The $25,000 grant, from the Buffalo-based Garman Family Foundation, will further develop the partnership between the clinic and the Family Justice Center of Erie County, which provides comprehensive services to clients, mostly women, experiencing intimate partner violence.

In the Domestic Violence High Risk Collaboration, says clinic director Judith Olin ’85, students will work directly with Family Justice Center clients who are identified as being at the highest risk for serious, even lethal, violence. “We will address legal issues that may be stopping them from leaving the situation,” says Olin, including issues involving housing, employment, child support, divorce and child custody. Under her supervision, clinic students will represent clients in court on some issues and refer them to other legal services providers on others.

This new effort will enable students to serve clients in immediate danger, Olin says, and teach them how to ensure the client’s safety. Students will meet with clients in the Family Justice Center’s Main Street facility, focusing on those who cannot afford a private attorney but earn too much to qualify for other free legal services. The grant money will also fund a student summer fellowship to carry on the work between academic years.

“The relationship we have with the clinic is critical to what we do,” says Tiffany M. Pavone ’02, director of operations at the Family Justice Center. “The students will fill an important gap in representing domestic violence victims who are at the highest risk of danger and find it hard to leave because of legal issues.”

A $50,000 “Justice for Heroes” grant – one of five awarded by New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo – will fund the creation of a new Veterans Legal Practicum at UB School of Law

The grants, which the governor announced on Veterans Day, are designed to enable New York law schools to provide legal services to military veterans, active service members and their families.

The UB Law practicum will establish “legal help desks” at several locations in Buffalo and other Western NY locations, aimed at helping veterans with their civil legal needs.

There will be a rigorous classroom component to get law students ready to provide service. The service-learning component will be performed under the supervision of a licensed lawyer. Law students will staff help desks and provide other services during the semester, with student fellows hired to ensure continuing coverage during the summer months. Students in the practicum will also develop and maintain a website to inform Western New York veterans, active-duty military members and their families about benefits, programs and services available to them.

The grant is eligible for renewal in each of the next two years.

“This is an important service-learning addition to our law school and community. Making an immediate difference in the lives of those who served while learning hands-on legal skills that can be deployed in the future is a win-win program,” says Professor Kim Diana Connolly, director of clinical legal education. “I am especially honored to have our experiential learning program launch this effort, because my father was a veteran, and I caring for him during his final years I had the honor to meet many Western NY veterans and get to know more about some of the legal issues they face.”