



Press Release

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Brown Rudnick Contact:

Lisa Murray
617.856.8509
lmurray@brownrudnick.com

Roger Williams University School of Law Contacts:

Meghan L. Hansen Leslie ann Gifford
401.254.4658 401.254.4559

Pro Bono Collaborative Helping Address Rhode Island's Unmet Legal Needs

This innovative project, sponsored by the Roger Williams University School of Law's Feinstein Institute, is supported by a generous grant from the Rhode Island Foundation

BRISTOL, R.I. (November 14, 2006): The Pro Bono Collaborative, a cutting edge model for delivery of critical legal services via pro bono lawyering, is well underway and receiving resounding accolades from the legal community and the community-based organizations whose clients are being served.

"The PBC is a welcome addition to Rhode Island's pro bono community," says Chief Justice Frank J. Williams, who has publicly pressed members of the R.I. Bar to dedicate time and effort to pro bono legal service. "I see it as precisely the vehicle that, with the other pro bono programs in the state, will help bring to fruition my goal of increasing every R.I. attorney's participation in pro bono activity and improve access to justice for all."

Funded with a generous grant from The Rhode Island Foundation, the Pro Bono Collaborative (PBC) was established at the Roger Williams University School of Law's Feinstein Institute for Legal Service in January 2006. The PBC partners law firms, community service providers and law students to collaborate on discrete legal projects to provide pro bono legal services to Rhode Island's underrepresented and underserved individuals, families, and communities.

"This was an obvious grant opportunity for the Foundation," said its president, Ronald V. Gallo, Ed.D. "The project and the people behind it are innovative, creative, ambitious, and dedicated. What's more, they are committed to serving the people who most need them. We're grateful that they've formed an alliance."

To date, three large R.I. firms and four non-profit service providers have teamed with School of Law students to address important unmet legal needs. Projects were chosen to match the personal and professional passions of participating attorneys and their firms.

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The service organizations are proven advocates, integral to the communities they serve. They know their clients and provide a trusted setting in which to address and navigate difficult issues that impact the poor. RWU law students are the next generation of community leaders; they are invested in the University's core value of public service and are committed to the collaborative goals of the PBC.

Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP has been working with Casey Family Services clients since March 2006 and has just added Meeting Street School's clients as well, providing education and assistance to parents of at-risk special needs children. To date, PS&H attorneys have invested more than 200 hours in the project; students have contributed 53 hours.

Brown Rudnick Berlack & Israels LLP is supporting the Community Housing Land Trust through the Housing Network of Rhode Island and Church Community Housing Corp., researching potential legislation and drafting legal documents that will ensure that R.I.'s limited number of affordable condominium units remains affordable in perpetuity. To date, students involved in this project have invested more than 700 hours of research and participating attorneys an estimated 150 hours.

Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge LLP is working to deliver rights education to parents of Rhode Island's at-risk youth. R.I. Children's Crusade was the initial forum for three legal rights workshops; similar workshops will now be provided at Children's Friend & Service R.I. EAPD attorneys have contributed 72 hours to this project and students have invested approximately 60.

Says Michael A. Gamboli, Esq., Partridge Snow & Hahn partner and PBC champion, "PS&H is very excited about this new collaboration and for being chosen by Roger Williams to be a leader in marshalling the combined talents and resources of the legal community, law school, and non-profit providers to address the important social needs of the citizens of Rhode Island."

The PBC was designed specifically to address the needs of individuals and families – entire communities even – whose legal needs were not, and under existing guidelines could not be met by the R.I. Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) and R.I. Legal Services (RILS).

While the work of both VLP and RILS is based on cases in litigation and with strict income eligibility requirements, the PBC involves large firm attorneys in legal work other than litigation. It is tailored to make pro bono legal work easy for non-litigators in a large-firm setting. Further, it recognizes that the legal needs of the poor often go beyond litigation. In addition, the PBC serves low-income people whose modest income may make them ineligible for VLP and RILS services. Through educational workshops, administrative advocacy, legislative advocacy, and advice and counsel around particular topics, the PBC and its partners are collaborating to promote systemic change, with the goal of remediating issues before they require court involvement.



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The PBC has been engineered to make pro bono legal service practical and rewarding for large-firm attorneys. It designs projects that are discrete, well-defined, and predictable. It marries the personal and professional interests of participating attorneys, while careful to avoid conflicts of interest for participating lawyers and firms. It identifies and recruits community experts on the legal issues to train both attorneys and students. And it provides eager and ambitious School of Law students to provide invaluable project support.

“What is unique about the Pro Bono Collaborative,” says Jennifer L. Brooks, Esq., RWU School of Law alumna and Brown Rudnick associate, “is that it pools the collective resources of the practitioner, the State's only law school, and the community in such a way that empowers us, as a group, to serve the needs of low- and modest-income people in Rhode Island who we would otherwise be unable to serve as well if each partner were acting independently. To this end, the Pro Bono Collaborative specifically offers a non-litigator like me the opportunity to provide meaningful and much needed pro bono service within the State of Rhode Island.”

The PBC is in the community, working to leverage existing resources toward the greater good of all Rhode Island. To request additional information about the Pro Bono Collaborative, please contact Eliza Vorenberg, Director (evorenberg@rwu.edu or 401-254-4597), or Leslie Gifford, Administrative Coordinator (lgifford@rwu.edu or 401-254-4559).

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