



# Press Release



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### THE ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW LAUNCHES PRO BONO COLLABORATIVE PILOT PROJECT

*Brown Rudnick, Partridge Snow & Hahn and Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge LLC provide pro bono services to Rhode Island's low-income residents*

**Boston, MA, May 15, 2006** – The Roger Williams University School of Law (RWU) has launched a Pro Bono Collaborative Pilot Project with the support of a generous grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. The project links three prominent law firms with local community-based organizations and RWU law students to increase the provision of legal services to Rhode Island's low-income residents. The Pilot Project focuses on legal needs that are not addressed by either the existing legal services organizations or pro bono efforts. The three firms – Brown Rudnick, Partridge Snow & Hahn and Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge LLC -- have joined the Collaborative, met with their respective community-based partners, and are ready to get to work. The student response to the Collaborative has been tremendous.

The impetus for the Collaborative was the Racial Justice Colloquium, funded by the Rhode Island Foundation (RIF), held at the School of Law in May 2004. The Colloquium brought together lawyers and community representatives to focus on issues of racial justice. As Liz Tobin Tyler, Director of the Public Service and Community Partnerships at the Feinstein Institute for Legal Service at the School of Law, stated, "One of the main concerns raised at the Colloquium was the dire need for pro bono legal assistance in low-income communities, particularly communities with a high concentration of people of color. With this in mind, we applied for and received a grant from the RIF to develop a survey assessing pro bono activity in Rhode Island. We presented the survey results to the Bar Association at the Annual Meeting and also brought in lawyers from the Pro Bono Initiative in Chicago to talk



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about the success of their influential program.” Based on the survey results, the Racial Justice Task Force recommendations, and feedback from the Bar, the Feinstein Institute for Legal Service at the School of Law applied for and received a second grant from the RIF to launch the Pro Bono Collaborative.

“The Collaborative is a new way of looking at the provision of pro bono legal service in Rhode Island. We are thrilled to bring that model to Rhode Island with the added component of law students,” said Laurie Barron, Director of the Feinstein Institute. “Through the Collaborative,” explained Barron, “low-income residents will get critically-needed legal assistance from some of Rhode Island’s top law firms; law firm attorneys will have the opportunity to learn first-hand the legal needs of community organizations; and law students will have the opportunity to learn from experienced attorneys and community advocates about collaborative approaches to improving social justice.”

Each firm has committed between four to six attorneys to one pro bono project. These attorneys will supervise two or more RWU law students and work in partnership with one or more community-based organizations. In addition, the Collaborative will facilitate ongoing communication, support, and expert training to the law students and the firm attorneys.

Brown Rudnick will assist organizations working to implement the Rhode Island law that requires ten percent of newly developed housing units be set aside as affordable housing. The project seeks to make new units affordable in perpetuity and provide legal assistance to low-income families seeking to purchase the affordable units. The community-based partners on this project are the Community Housing Land Trust of Rhode Island, Housing Network, and Church Community Housing Corporation.

Partridge Snow & Hahn will work on a special education advocacy project to provide rights training and legal assistance to families who have recently adopted an at-risk foster child with Special Education needs. Casey Family Services is the community-based partner on this project.



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Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge, LLC will work on a modified Street Law project. Street Law is active in 70 law schools nationwide (including Roger Williams); placing law students in classrooms to teach urban youths about the laws that affect their lives. The RWU Project will extend this legal rights education to parents of children in South Providence. The community-based partner is the Rhode Island Children's Crusade for Higher Education.

Eliza Vorenberg, an experienced attorney with extensive and varied public interest and law firm experience, is directing the Collaborative. Drawing on feedback from participating parties in the Pilot, RWU hopes to expand the program to encompass additional projects and involve more of Rhode Island's outstanding law firms and community-based organizations in this innovative and important effort to address critical unmet legal needs.

## **About Brown Rudnick Berlack Israels LLP**

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