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CLINIC STUDENTS FORGE AHEAD IN SPITE OF COURT CLOSURES

Law students offering legal aid in difficult circumstances

Students in Suffolk Law's 12 in-house legal clinics are still representing clients even though courts in Massachusetts are closed for all but emergency cases.

For now, that means student attorneys are still busy at work—whether it's asking the court to issue a restraining order or helping to ensure that landlords are not resorting to illegal lockouts.

Students are meeting with clients and opposing counsel via mobile phone or Skype to field questions, build their cases, and continue to research case law, says Clinical Professor Ragini Shah, the acting director of Clinical Programs.

The courts have asked family law attorneys to work toward settling cases when that makes sense, says Chris Butler, co-director with Maritza Karmely of Suffolk's Family Law Clinic. Students have been negotiating with opposing counsel on issues including child custody, parenting time and child support.

Students are staying in touch with clients, keeping them informed of what is happening in the courts and letting them know that if an emergency arises, they can, in fact, access the courts for relief, Butler says. "The regular contact and information-sharing is helpful for our clients who are struggling with these extraordinary circumstances and financial challenges."

Shah emphasized that students are well-placed to respond if a client is facing an emergency. “They’ve been working with their clients since September, so they have built solid relationships by this time,” she says. “Our clinics already use virtual case files, which means students can access all of their clients’ documents remotely and securely and respond quickly in an emergency.”

Under state law, student attorneys are permitted to represent real clients who would otherwise not be able to afford a lawyer. Suffolk Law students work in a range of legal specialties including juvenile and criminal defense, health care access, domestic violence, custody issues, asylum, human rights, wrongful incarceration, business entity formation, criminal prosecution, and patent and copyright protection.

The school’s clinics are ranked 14th in the nation by US News & World Report’s 2021 Best Law Schools and have been ranked in the Top 25 for 12 of the past 13 years.

Suffolk Law drew the attention of **The Boston Globe on April 2 (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/02/nation/pandemic-poses-significant-access-to-justice-obstacles-cambridge-technologist-is-developing-solutions/>)** for its partnership with state courts to create mobile apps that allow easy access and guidance for 30 court forms at a time when many people do not have access to printers and scanners.

The Housing Discrimination Testing Program’s (HDTP) virtual brown bags, regional testing agency meetings, and its already active Fair Housing listserv, have become vital tools to connect government agencies, non-profits, and advocates throughout the state to share the latest fair housing developments. As the news and legal guidance evolve day to day, HDTP has played a key role in sharing resources and information to protect the community from housing discrimination during the pandemic. Among other topics, participants have shared best practices to allow discrimination investigations to continue at a time when vulnerable populations face increased housing instability.

IP & Entrepreneurship Clinic students continue to represent their clients--inventors, artists and mom and pop businesses--with electronic filings to the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Clinic students have been profiled in the Washington Post and Seattle Times for their work representing small businesses in trademark cases brought by large corporations like Monster Energy Drink and Nautica.

Each of the in-house clinics trains students to be practice-ready by teaching key legal skills in the context of a real world client/problem; asking students to consistently reflect on their performance; and documenting improvements in skills over time. This reflective process allows students to move from learning the law to doing the law and doing it well. By the end of the year, students in every clinic have interviewed and counseled clients, engaged in strategic decision making, and advocated for their clients' interests.

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