

The Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic Celebrates 50 Years of Advancing Access to Justice



Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic Professors Christopher Northrop, Deirdre Smith, Courtney Beer, Tina Schneider, and Anna Welch

By **Liz Woodbury**

2020 marked a significant milestone for Maine Law’s Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic. This defining program – one of the oldest law school legal aid clinics in the nation – first opened its doors 50 years ago. Today, Maine Law’s Clinic provides free legal advice and representation to more than 600 low-income Mainers every year, while training student attorneys in the real-life skills they will need to practice law.

Cushman Anthony established the Clinic in 1970, with the help of a grant from the Ford Foundation. Over the years, the Clinic’s location has changed, from its Old Port beginnings in the former Grace Baptist Mission on Market Street, to the Law School basement, to a series of white houses on Exeter Street. But its mission has remained steadfast: to fulfill Maine Law’s ongoing commitment to social justice and to provide hands-on, experiential training to its students.

The Clinic students are specially licensed to practice as attorneys while still in law school, under the supervision of Maine Law faculty who are licensed to practice law in Maine. “In every sense that student is the attorney on the case,” says Deirdre M. Smith ’94, the Clinic’s current director and associate dean for experiential education. Today, about half of all Maine Law students participate in one or more of the Clinic’s many programs, gaining the practical skills and confidence they will need in their careers. Professor Anna Welch, who supervises students in the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic (RHRC), says this experience allows students to “apply concepts they’ve learned in the classroom to real-world examples.”

Over time, the Clinic has expanded to include four dedicated clinics – General Practice, Juvenile Justice, Prisoner Assistance, and Refugee and Human Rights – as well as a separate Protection From Abuse project. In 2000, an estimated 200 clients were served each year; the Clinic assists three times that many today. During the past 15 years, the Clinic’s focus has also broadened to include more outreach and a significant amount of policy work.

“In medical school, students have residencies so they can be supervised in the practice of medicine. It’s not a requirement in law school – but you take someone’s life in your hands when you go in front of a judge or jury on their behalf. It just makes sense, before graduating, to have the kind of practice that the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic provides.”

Brandon Berg ’21, Student Attorney, RHRC

Since its start a half century ago, the Clinic has consistently identified gaps in access to justice and worked to close them. It has had a profound impact on the entire state, giving thousands of Mainers equal access to justice that might have been denied to them because of their economic situation. It has also trained a generation of lawyers who are well-versed in the importance of public service, and who graduated practice-ready.

General Practice Clinic

According to Clinic Managing Director Deirdre M. Smith, general practice clinics have gone out of style at many law schools across the country. Smith, who has served as part of the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic faculty, supervising and mentoring students in Maine Law's General Practice Clinic (GPC), says, "Specialized clinics are great, but I love that we still have something that reflects the original vision for the Clinic." In fact, most of the Clinic's full-representation work happens in the GPC, which provides legal services to low-income Mainers in the form of student attorneys who are specially licensed by state and federal courts. "General Practice gives students the skills and relationships that are specific to practices that predominate throughout Maine," Smith says.

By design, cases in the GPC mirror those taken on by attorneys in small firms around the state, with an emphasis on family and criminal law. Ben Everett, a 3L from Aroostook County who plans to practice there after law school, says the GPC "offers exposure to the broad scope of legal issues I'm likely to encounter in that rural setting." This experience, he says, combined with the guidance and mentorship he's received, "will help me prepare to hit the ground running when I get home."

Many cases come to the GPC through community partnerships, says Smith. "We're responsive to the needs of the courts, and we're tightly

integrated with other legal aid providers. When we see a gap in services, that's an opportunity for collaboration." Students frequently take on cases after connecting with clients during weekly Protection From Abuse days in Lewiston District Court. "We look for cases where there's some complexity and a high degree of need," says Smith. As well as family law issues like parental rights, divorce, and child support, cases also include other civil matters such as probate, administrative, and consumer law, and a range of criminal defense cases. Meghan Szylvian '12, now a supervising attorney in the Attorney General's Office, remembers taking on a head-spinning variety of cases in a single semester, "From divorces and juvenile clients to state and federal criminal cases, as well as helping to incorporate a non-profit."

Everett says, "There's no such thing as a 'typical' day in the GPC." He describes the work as challenging and ever-changing. "My clients are dealing with dynamic legal issues that bend and flex on a daily basis," he says. Smith agrees that the work can be demanding. "We push students beyond their comfort level," she says. "And it's daunting to be entrusted with someone's story and legal problems. But we provide them an elaborate system of safety nets, with all the support, mentoring, and supervision they might need." Szylvian notes that among the many "firsts" she experienced in the GPC, "it's also the first time you experience failure as a lawyer – but it's met by the guiding hand of the faculty who are there to educate new generations of lawyers."

The GPC's goal could hardly be more straightforward. "Our entire job is to help our students learn how to be great lawyers," says Smith. "No matter what they've done before this, it is the first time they will be in the role of having a client, interacting with court – of actually being an attorney." For students, this means learning to counsel

and interview clients, negotiate with opposing parties, and argue effectively in court, among many other skills. "In classes, I learned the law," says Szylvian. "In Clinic, I learned to be a lawyer."

Smith says that as law in Maine has grown more complex over time, the GPC has evolved along with it. COVID-19 hasn't slowed them down either. "In fact," says Smith, "students have quickly become well versed in best practices for remote work, including court hearings and client interviews." Smith's long-term goal is to stay the course that the GPC has charted over the years. "I want to continue to reflect how law is practiced in Maine, and to prepare students for that. We've always managed to be reflective and responsive to the ongoing changes in legal practice. I think we'll continue to do that."

Protection From Abuse Project

Established in 1999

Every Friday morning, two or three Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic student attorneys arrive at Lewiston District Court in time for the 8:30 am docket call. Under the supervision of Adjunct Clinical Professor Tina Schneider, they spend a fast-paced day – frequently working right through lunch – representing plaintiffs in Protection From Abuse (PFA) cases. "I can't tell you how often you see the utter relief on a client's face when they realize they won't have to represent themselves," says Sanchita Mukherjee, a 3L at Maine Law. "The idea of being on their own in a courtroom can be terrifying."

It's hard to overstate the value of the PFA program to the Clinic students, each of whom is required to sign up for at least two PFA days during the semester, and to the approximately 200 clients they serve each year. For these particular plaintiffs, representation is especially important, says District Court Judge Susan Oram. "Court appearances are always stressful, but the stakes are high in these cases. We are very fortunate to have the Clinic students."

Some students find it challenging to be "constantly thinking on their feet," as Schneider describes it, but she says that most "absolutely love the work – the fast pace, the legal issues, and these particular clients," and many sign up for additional days. The project's overwhelming benefit, she adds, is that "if you want trial experience, doing a PFA case is the way to get it." Mukherjee describes the program as "the most immediate presentation of the judiciary that any student attorney is ever going to see."

Smith says that while Clinic students have represented clients in PFA matters since the PFA statute's enactment in 1980, "consistent weekly coverage of the PFA docket in Lewiston District



Ben Everett '21 General Practice Clinic

Hometown: Fort Fairfield, ME

Undergraduate: A.A.S. in emergency medical services from Northern Maine Community College and B.A. in business administration, University of Maine at Presque Isle

“The Clinic remains a pillar of real-life legal education for those who intend to live and serve right here in the State of Maine. The experience it offers to Maine Law students is truly expansive, and can provide a crucial stepping-off point for a fruitful professional life.”



Sanchita Mukherjee '21 Protection From Abuse Project

Hometown: Sarasota, FL
Undergraduate: B.S. in microbiology and cell sciences,
University of Florida

“For students in the Clinic, PFA day is the most boots on the ground that a student attorney could ever be. It’s the most immediate presentation of the judiciary that any student attorney is ever going to see.”

Court became a distinct Clinic program in 1999,” under the guidance of then-Clinical Professor (now Superior Court Justice) Valerie Stanfill ’85, aided by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice. Schneider has overseen the project since 2006 in collaboration with Safe Voices, a domestic violence advocacy and services nonprofit organization. “They provide emotional support and safety planning for our clients. And if we can’t take on a case, they fill in to negotiate between parties,” says Schneider.

While the project’s mission has remained constant, Schneider has witnessed many changes over the years, including the nature of evidence itself. “Increasingly, it takes the form of cell phone photos and social media posts,” she says. COVID-19 has also caused some changes. Schneider typically sits with her student and their client during hearings, available for advice and questions. “We were a foot and a half away from each other,” she says. “And that won’t work now.” Instead, she remains in the gallery with her cell phone, one earbud in, advising her student remotely. “I’ll be whispering, ‘Object: relevance!’ and the student will object.”

She can’t say for sure that it’s connected to the pandemic, but Schneider has also seen a recent increase in PFA filings. “One week, the list of cases was three pages long,” she says. “I’ve never seen that before, in 14 years.” Mukherjee attests to the busy docket. “My first day ever, I had five clients, which is almost unheard of.”

While Schneider and her students have rallied to meet the challenges presented by social distancing, she notes one sad side effect. “We used to drive up and back together. It was a chance to learn about students’ lives, answer questions about cases, and debrief about the day. That’s gone now.”

For many of Schneider’s students, the PFA experience is transformative. “Some of them are petrified by the idea of actually arguing in court. It can be intimidating,” she says. “I suspect that

if weren’t required, some of them wouldn’t do it.” After some initial trepidation, Mukherjee came to a gradual realization about herself: “I absolutely love being in a courtroom.” Witnessing this, Schneider says, is one of the best things about her job. “You can see them realize, ‘I can do this – and I like it!’ A student hits their stride, and it’s lovely.”

Prisoner Assistance Clinic

Established in 2003

When Jim Burke launched Maine Law’s Prisoner Assistance Clinic (PAC) in 2003, it was “a total unknown,” he says. “There were just a few people pushing for it.” Among those original boosters were Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic Acting Director Valerie Stanfill and Calien Lewis, executive director of the Maine Bar Foundation (now the Maine Justice Foundation). They had identified a critical lack of access to justice in the state’s prison population: incarcerated people who faced pressing civil concerns were frequently unable to obtain legal counsel. Federal law precluded federally funded legal aid for prisoners, and an inability to access online resources meant they couldn’t acquire even basic legal information. Stanfill tapped

Burke to head up a new sub-clinic that would fall under the Clinic’s umbrella. Clinic Managing Director Deirdre Smith says, “Jim had no model to work from when he built the PAC – there was no precedent for law students going into the prison and talking to the prisoners.” The Maine Bar Foundation provided the discretionary grant that made this innovative project possible.

Burke nurtured the PAC through its first 17 years, cultivating its reputation within the community and the prison system itself. “As time went on,” he says, “we became a trusted and valued ally and service that the Department of Corrections appreciated for its positive effect on the inmates.” Burke retired in 2019, and in January 2020 Courtney Beer ’07, former directing attorney at Pine Tree Legal Assistance’s Kids Legal project, joined the Law School faculty to oversee the PAC. A Clinic alumna herself, she calls it a “dream job,” adding, “There’s nothing better than being able to teach students the work I found so incredibly rewarding myself.”

Student attorneys, supervised by Beer, take on up to 20 cases per semester, meeting with clients at the Maine Correctional Center in Windham or advising them remotely over the phone. Each year, PAC students provide legal information, advice, and representation to hundreds of incarcerated clients on a wide range of legal matters, from family law concerns such as divorce and custody to bankruptcy, probate, small claims, and other civil issues. PAC alumnus Devie Hamlen ’05 says, “Most of my clients were dealing with things that happen to people who don’t have a lot of money.” This remains true of PAC clients today.

Before starting law school, 3L Shianne Bowlin wrote her Master’s thesis on the barriers to effective re-entry for incarcerated people. The PAC has given her a unique opportunity for hands-on experience in an area about which she cares deeply.

Shianne Bowlin '21 Prisoner Assistance Clinic

Hometown: Princeton, IN
Undergraduate: B.A. in psychology, Spanish, and criminal justice, University of Southern Indiana
Graduate: M.S. in forensic psychology, Arizona State University

“I firmly believe that regardless of an individual’s background, they still deserve help, and the Prisoner Assistance Clinic gives me the chance to act on that belief. By providing assistance without judgment or bias, we can help reshape people’s perceptions of the legal system.”



"It allows me to directly help people with legal issues that could inhibit them from success," she says. Unresolved matters like bankruptcy or a loss of parental custody can make re-entry more difficult on an individual level, but the effect is societal as well. "The benefits to the state of Maine are enormous," Smith says. "Taking care of problems while people are still incarcerated means more success in employment, family connections, and reintegrating with the community."

Beer says, "These are the most appreciative clients I've ever worked with. It's obvious in their interactions with the students, as well as their kind words and evaluations. They have no way to access information around civil legal issues – and we bridge that gap for them." In addition to the advice and representation student attorneys provide their clients, says Smith, "they're also giving them the knowledge and confidence they need to advocate for themselves."

One of Beer's long-term goals is to provide an even greater level of service statewide. Challenges presented by COVID-19 have had a silver lining, allowing her student attorneys to hone their ability to "lawyer remotely." She says, "Now that we know we can provide really solid remote legal assistance, I'd love to eventually do more proactive outreach." In the meantime, the PAC's original mission persists. At one point during his work as a student attorney, Hamlen realized that "these were mostly good people who had a bad moment in their lives." And as Burke says, "If you treat people with respect and show them they're heard, it's amazing what can happen."

Juvenile Justice Clinic

Established in 2006

Since it was founded by Clinical Professor Christopher Northrop in 2006, the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic's Juvenile Justice Clinic (JJC) has stood apart from most comparable projects. "The majority of juvenile clinics were focused on individual representation of youth who were charged with crimes," says Northrop. "We wanted to build a clinic that did that, but also took lessons from what we saw in court and translated them into policy." Over the past 15 years, that's precisely what the JJC has achieved.

The impetus for a policy-focused juvenile clinic at the Law School came from a 2003 assessment of access to counsel in Maine juvenile justice cases. The report, from the American Bar Association Juvenile Justice Center and the New England Juvenile Defender Center, found

many areas that needed improvement. It also specifically recommended the formation of a clinic that would strengthen the juvenile justice defense bar through both practice and policy. With the help of a generous grant from the Sam L. Cohen Foundation, Northrop spent the next few years building a pilot program.

JJC student attorneys, licensed by state and federal courts and supervised by Northrop, provide direct representation to young clients in a variety of ways, including as counsel in juvenile proceedings and as Lawyers of the Day (LOD) in Cumberland and York County. Client referrals come from community partners including Preble Street Teen Center, as well as from judges, defense attorneys, and prosecutors.

"I was convinced to go to law school because of the Juvenile Justice Clinic," says Anne Sedlack '20, who got her foot in the door during her 1L year as a fellow in the Maine Center for Juvenile Policy and Law (MCJPAL), a new program within the Clinic. Since 2017, aided by a generous grant from the John T. Gorman Foundation, the MCJPAL has partnered with the JJC, supporting its policy initiatives. MJCPAL Project Manager Jill Ward says, "Students who identify policy or practice barriers they can't address by representing their client can bring those issues to the Center."

Jon Ruterbories, a 3L at Maine Law, has seen his own policy work "come full circle" as a student attorney. After collaborating on a guide for juvenile LODs, he says, "It's amazing – a year after helping create it, I actually get to use it as LOD in Biddeford District Court." The need for such a guide, and the student-led effort to fill that need, illustrates Northrop's assertion that "when we see something that's a systematic issue, we have the ability to take it on, on a policy level."

Over the past 15 years, Northrop has observed significant positive changes in the court system. "The population at Long Creek has declined over the years, from about 200 to around 40 today," he says. "Over half of the cases that begin with police contact never go to court." In these instances, instead of facing probation or incarceration, young people form plans with juvenile probation officers that might include community service or treatment. "The numbers are incredible," says Northrop. "Youth who get informal adjustments just don't get in trouble again," nor do they carry criminal records with them into their adult lives.

Ruterbories praises the JJC's broad impact, saying, "I don't think youth in Maine would have anywhere close to effective representation without this clinic." Systemic policy reform initiated by students in the JJC obtained



Painting by David Silsby '58

PRESENT DAY

BY THE NUMBERS

In 2019, the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic provided varying levels of legal assistance to more than **651** clients.

■ Clinic clients came from at least **19** countries of origin.

■ **51** students at Maine Law enrolled in Clinic courses in 2019.

■ In addition, the Clinic hired **6** student interns, **1** public policy Cushman Anthony Fellow, and **1** juvenile policy Maine Association for Public Interest Law Fellow for the summer of 2019 as part of the Summer Intern Program.

■ Students who participated in Clinic in 2019 were exposed to a range of proceedings where they gained valuable experience appearing as counsel in the following: **9** interim hearings; **49** Protection From Abuse trials; **196** Protection From Abuse agreements presented to the Court; **56** juvenile proceedings; **13** family law final hearings or trials; **12** mediations; **5** judicial settlement conferences; **44** non-hearing proceedings before family law magistrates; **20** arraignments; **10** change of pleas; **37** criminal dispositional conferences; **6**

sentencing hearings; **3** asylum interviews; **1** marriage-based petition interview; and numerous other miscellaneous appearances.



Jon Ruterbories '21 Juvenile Justice Clinic

Hometown: South Portland, ME
Undergraduate: B.A. in education with a minor in molecular biology, Saint Louis University

“I don’t think youth in the state of Maine would have anywhere close to effective representation without the Juvenile Justice Clinic.”

the support of Maine’s Supreme Judicial Court, which promulgated a 2015 amendment to the Maine Rules of Unified Criminal Procedure ending the practice of shackling children in juvenile court. Similar advocacy, in partnership with the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic, garnered the support of the Maine Legislature, which enacted a 2019 law that broadened Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for youth between the ages of 18 and 21 (see News Brief p. 8).

Northrop says the JJC’s ultimate goal “is to put itself out of business.” He adds, “We would love to change from juvenile justice to youth justice, including the 21 to 25 year-old group as well.” The future looks bright, thanks in large part to the policy work of his own clinical students. And as Sedlack emphasizes, the JJC has already had a profound impact in Maine: “Both Chris and Jill have taught their students – and the criminal justice system itself – to recognize that kids are kids, and they should be treated that way.”

Refugee and Human Rights Clinic

Established in 2012

In her eight years at the helm of Maine Law’s Refugee and Human Rights Clinic (RHRC), Clinical Professor Anna Welch has witnessed continual shifts in both the needs of Maine’s immigrant community and in the laws that affect them. “Part of our work is ensuring that lawyers stay on top of these ever-evolving changes,” she says. One thing that has remained constant is the demand for what she and her students are providing: legal representation and advocacy for this vulnerable, underserved group.

In designing the RHRC, Welch drew on her student experience in the International Human Rights Clinic at American University Washington College of Law, as well as her work as an immigration attorney. She’d long been impressed by Maine Law’s Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic but

noted the absence of a dedicated program serving the state’s growing immigrant and refugee population. In collaboration with the Immigrant Legal Aid Project (ILAP) and Clinic Managing Director Deirdre Smith, and with seed grants from the Sam L. Cohen and Davis Family Foundations, the RHRC became a reality in 2012.

The youngest of the clinics, its reputation is already formidable. It’s what attracted students like 3L Kelsey Lee to Maine Law in the first place. “I knew Professor Welch had created some incredible opportunities to learn and serve immigrants in Maine and at the U.S.-Mexico border. It’s why I chose to come here,” she says. 3L Brandon Berg was drawn to the RHRC for similar reasons. “It’s also personal for me, as a first-generation American on my mom’s side,” he says. “This work feels important and timely.”

In a typical semester, RHRC student attorneys, supervised by Welch and Adjunct Clinical Professor Erica Schair-Cardona, work directly with refugees and political asylum seekers. As well as representing clients in immigration court and providing advice about asylum cases, the students also work with abused or abandoned children seeking legal status in the U.S., domestic violence plaintiffs, and immigrant victims of

crimes, among others.

Outreach projects have taken students as far afield as the Laredo Detention Center in Texas and the Artesia Center, a now-shuttered detention facility in New Mexico. “We were the first legal team from Maine to go to Artesia,” says Welch. In 2014, RHRC student attorneys spent a week representing women and children who were detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) after fleeing conditions of extreme violence and poverty in their home countries.

More recently, the RHRC’s work has increasingly focused on local immigrant detention, including detainees held at the Cumberland County Jail, as ICE’s presence has grown in New England. “We only get an hour or two with each client, to help them understand their chances of defense against deportation,” says Berg. “It’s so personal when you’re sitting there hearing someone’s stories.” COVID-19 has also forced some temporary changes. “The border is shut down right now, so asylum cases are stalled,” says Welch. “And honestly, there’s enough to do in our own backyard.”

“Maine has over 6,000 asylum seekers right now,” Welch says. “My hope is to train a new generation of lawyers who can take on these cases.” Clinic alumna Joann Bautista ’18 emphasizes the RHRC’s essential role in the state: “The issue can seem very far away, but the RHRC brings it home. As the demographics of Maine change, it plays a critical part in helping our friends and neighbors establish their lives here.”

Welch’s ultimate goal is to further serve the community by opening a Refugee and Human Rights Center at the Law School. “I’ve proposed hiring a staff attorney so we’d have the capacity to do even more work,” she says. Smith shares this vision, citing the strong interest law students have in this field, and says, “We’re hoping to build on the great success and significant impact of the RHRC by expanding our work providing education, outreach, and systemic advocacy in the area of immigration and human rights law.”



Kelsey Lee '21 Refugee and Human Rights Clinic

Hometown: Lincoln, NE
Undergraduate: B.A. in anthropology with a minor in human rights and humanitarian affairs, University of Nebraska

“There is a huge need in Portland for asylum representation. The RHRC’s work truly helps meet this need and provides high quality representation for its clients.”

CLINIC MILESTONES

1969

■ Maine Legislature amends 4 M.R.S.A. § 807 to permit eligible law students to practice under faculty supervision and pursuant to rules set by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court.

■ University of Maine School of Law Dean Edward Godfrey obtains a grant from the Council on Legal Education for Professional Responsibility (funds provided by the Ford Foundation) to launch the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic.

1970

■ Founding Director Cushman Anthony establishes the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic. The first location was in the Old Port at the former Grace Baptist Mission on Market Street.

1972

■ Professor Judy Potter starts as director of the Clinic.



1977

■ The Clinic receives the Emil Gumpert award of the American College of Trial Lawyers for excellence in the teaching of trial advocacy.

1988

■ Professor Michael W. Mullane starts as director of the Clinic.



■ Clinic moves to 65 Exeter Street location.

1995

■ Clinic moves to new location at 59 Exeter Street – 50% larger than previous offices.



1998



■ Maine's current Governor, Janet T. Mills, then an attorney in private practice in Skowhegan, supervises Clinic summer interns.

■ Scott Gould starts as director of the Clinic.

1999

■ U.S. Justice Department Office of Violence Against Women awards Clinic the first grant to represent plaintiffs in Protection From Abuse proceedings in Lewiston District Court on a weekly basis.

2001

■ Professor Valerie Stanfill starts as interim director of the Clinic.

2003

■ Professor Jim Burke launches the Prisoner Assistance Clinic with grant funds provided by the Maine Bar Foundation and the Maine Department of Corrections.



■ Funds raised during the Law School's Foundations for the Future Campaign provides for expansion and improved accessibility of the Clinic building.

2004

■ Professor Deirdre Smith starts as director of the Clinic.



2006

■ Professor Chris Northrop launches the Juvenile Justice Clinic with grant funds from the Sam L. Cohen Foundation and Maine Bar Foundation, among others.



■ Professor Tina Schneider begins as faculty supervisor for the Protection From Abuse program.

2008

■ The Chronicle of Higher Education profiles two Clinic student attorneys for their representation of Maine college students targeted in file sharing litigation brought by the Recording Industry Association of America.

2011

■ Clinic establishes the Cushman D. Anthony Summer Fellowship in juvenile policy.

■ Safe Voices honors the Clinic with "Community Hero Award" for "invaluable efforts on behalf of victims of domestic violence in the courtroom."

2012

■ Professor Anna Welch launches the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic with grant funds provided by the Sam L. Cohen Foundation and the Davis Family Foundation.



2013

■ Adjunct Clinical Professor Tina Schneider receives Thomas P. Downing Award.

2017

■ Maine Center for Juvenile Policy and Law launches with a grant from the John T. Gorman Foundation. Jill Ward begins as project manager.

■ Professor Christopher Northrop receives "Unsung Hero Award" from the Maine Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys.

■ Maine Law receives a grant from Sam L. Cohen Foundation to create the Sam L. Cohen Refugee and Human Rights Clinical Professorship.

2018

■ Professor Christopher Northrop receives Robert E. Shepherd Jr. Leadership Award for Excellence in Juvenile Defense from the National Juvenile Defender Center.



2019

■ Professor Jim Burke receives the Howard H. Dana, Jr. Award from the Maine Justice Foundation.

2020

■ Professor Courtney Beer starts as director of the Prisoner Assistance Clinic, following the retirement of Prof. Burke.



■ Professor Anna Welch receives Thomas P. Downing, Jr. Award.

■ In honor of the Clinic's 50th Anniversary, Maine Law launches a fundraising effort to support Clinic Summer Interns.

■ Maine Supreme Judicial Court expands its student practice rules to allow practice as a student attorney after three semesters of law school.

ALUMNI MEMORIES

How did your Clinic experience influence your career path?

“As a law student, you learn about laws and cases that can sometimes seem dusty and archaic, with little relationship to everyday life. But as a student attorney at the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, I learned about how the law affects peoples’ lives. I represented people in cases that could dictate their family life or their criminal record. My clients mattered and their cases mattered. And, with the help of the clinical professors, I learned that I had the skills to help. A legal education is a powerful thing, and the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic taught me the power of using legal skills on behalf of people who need it most.”



Emma Bond '12
Legal Director
ACLU of Maine

“The Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic provided me with hands-on mentoring and guidance from legal experts that cared deeply about my professional development, all while working on actual legal matters that substantially contributed to the needs of the local community. The experience was invaluable for me, not only by providing me with tangible legal training that I still benefit from to this day, but by connecting me with a community of service-minded colleagues that remain one of my primary professional networks.”



Ira Sterling '12
Attorney
Injured Workers' Legal Center

“While at the Clinic, I quickly learned that I was fascinated by the dynamic nature of family law. It became clear to me that courtroom experience was the key to a successful career in family law and I am thankful for the abundance of courtroom opportunities that the Clinic had to offer. The thought provoking case strategy conversations with faculty supervisors and my colleagues left a lasting impact on me. Because of this, I was able to pursue a career in family law without hesitation. As a family law practitioner, I am constantly calling upon the foundational skills and life lessons that I gained from the Clinic.”



Whitney Lallas '19
Associate Attorney, Family Law Matters
MittelAsen

“As a Summer Clinic Intern, the professors, clients, and caseload shaped my path to becoming a legal aid attorney in countless ways. I learned from excellent faculty how to provide compassionate legal counsel in a down-to-earth and understandable manner. Whether in family law, immigration law, or a number of other civil legal areas, we were constantly challenged to meet our clients where they were while also crafting written and oral arguments for the courtroom. We had to bring our legal education to the real world, including the really practical elements of “how do you use a legal interpreter to meet with a client?” “How do you use cell phone evidence?” “What happens if your client’s testimony isn’t what you expected?”

The experience was rich with finding solutions for real human needs – something I try to do every day in my career as a staff attorney at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, where I hone the skills I learned in the Clinic to meet the needs of low income Mainers in many areas of law including housing, consumer, and public benefits.”

Christopher Marot '14
Staff Attorney
Pine Tree Legal Assistance



1970 - 2020