We Hear You:

By Danielle M. Conway, Dean and Professor of Law

The past year has been one of great upheaval. We’ve witnessed a polarizing election, impassioned protests, legal and philosophical battles over national and local policies, as well as the power and obligation of government. These divisions have tested the bonds between neighbors and friends. They’ve prompted difficult questions about the future of the Republic, and whether we can move toward common ground.

In Maine, we’ve heard the voices of communities that feel left out of the American discourse. These voices transcend political identity. They come from rural towns, where the promises of politicians ring hollow to struggling families. They come from minorities united against institutional racism, and new Mainers facing a backlash because of their religion or country of origin. They come from veterans, the elderly, and the poor, all of whom deserve more opportunities and more respect than society affords them. To those voices we say: We hear you.

But how do we respond? What role does Maine Law play in this time of change?

We do what we have always done: We affirm the rule of law and fiercely defend against injustice in any sphere. With renewed urgency, we focus on work that has a real, positive impact on all the people of Maine, especially the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, and the underserved.

We are resolute on our commitment to Maine, engaging in projects and supporting policies to improve access to justice, to create economic opportunities, and to uphold fundamental rights.

On these pages you will meet some of the Maine Law professors, students, staff, and alumni who are fulfilling that mission. You’ll read about a new state law, shepherded by our own Professor Deirdre Smith, that makes our court system more fair, responsive, and compassionate to children. You’ll be introduced to innovative programs launched at Maine Law, including a summer immersion program that creates a path for those who are underrepresented in the legal profession, as well as a pilot program that connects our students with rural communities that need affordable, high quality legal services.

You’ll meet students and alumni who are focused on improving the lives of people on the margins of society through volunteerism, the use of advanced technology, education and advocacy, and direct representation.

These are just a few snapshots that capture the spirit, work, and impact of our Maine Law community. There are many more people who are not represented on these pages, but whose contributions are equally valuable. Collectively, they form a mosaic of our true north – our belief that there is no greater duty than service to others, whether it be through law, business, politics, or civic engagement.

By focusing on work and programs that uplift, we keep our community engaged – civically and civilly – with one another, even in the most challenging of times.
In 2014 I left private practice to head the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, which is responsible for championing Maine’s iconic wild blueberry industry. Maine is the only state in the U.S. that grows this wild crop commercially, 99 percent of which is frozen. The 500 growers and six processors I advocate on behalf of have seen yields quintuple in 30 years to over 100 million pounds annually. However, they are currently facing competition in the form of surplus highbush blueberries and cheaper Canadian wild blueberries, resulting in falling prices that in turn threaten livelihoods.

Preserving and enhancing this industry is of paramount importance to growers and their families, and struggling Downeast and Mid-Coast communities. On a larger scale, supporting this industry means standing up for the state’s agricultural economy.

To remedy this situation, I’ve sought expansion into new markets by helping launch a national school foodservice program aimed at increasing wild blueberry consumption in public K-12 schools. Next, the industry must aggressively support innovation in the form of value-added processing of wild blueberry products that will stimulate jobs, enhance Maine’s burgeoning food economy, and boost grower prices.

Private, non-profit, and government investment are all necessary to make such ventures a reality. Further, I aim to partner with Maine’s hospitality and restaurant industries so they can introduce tourists to the Maine wild blueberry by incorporating the berries into their menus. With home-grown support, Mainers can help turn this situation around.

It’s a privilege working on behalf of the hardworking men and women who produce such a remarkable product. I hope to help this Maine industry succeed for another 150 years.

**Impact**

The wild blueberry industry contributes more than $250 million to Maine’s economy and employs more than 2,500 seasonal and year-round workers.

**About Nancy McBrady**

A native of Lewiston, McBrady was a management consultant in Chicago and New York, and later worked as an attorney at Preti Flaherty in Portland before joining the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine.
Although African-Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans make up more than 35 percent of the population and about 20 percent of law school graduates, they make up less than 7 percent of law firm partners and 9 percent of general counsels of large corporations.
By Michel Kanyambo, LL.M. ’14
Immigration Legal Services/AOR Coordinator, Catholic Charities Maine

I came to the United States from Rwanda in 2009 as an asylum seeker, and the process took me two years. After obtaining asylum my priority was to reunite with my family that I left behind, and to work hard to rebuild my life.

It was starting from scratch with the goal of becoming successful in my new country. Having a strong legal studies background and legal work experience in Africa were not enough for me, so I decided to go back to school to study the American system. I earned my LL.M. (Master of Laws) at Maine Law. My plan was, and still is, to sit for the bar and to practice law or embrace a related career in the legal field.

Through my work at Catholic Charities, I am profoundly happy and proud to serve my fellow refugees and immigrants in various immigration matters. I am especially proud to contribute to their path to U.S. citizenship and reunification with their families.

This work matters a lot to me because the people I serve are in great need of immigration services and cannot afford to hire private attorneys. Free immigration services are not a guarantee to everyone in Maine, but at Catholic Charities we try our best to provide those services at a minimal charge. I am happy to help and serve people in the same ways I was helped and served during my long immigration journey.

Impact
Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS) has assisted nearly 10,000 people through its resettlement program and assisted over 20,000 with refugee and asylee support services.

About Michel Kanyambo
Kanyambo was hired in 2015 by Catholic Charities Maine as coordinator of a family reunification program for refugees and asylees. He also works in the legal services department as an immigration legal assistant, and is a board member at Maine Equal Justice Partners.
The Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic provided assistance to more than 635 clients last year, of which 232 cases were protection from abuse matters, and 136 were other family law matters, making family law the largest category of cases handled by the Clinic.

About Deirdre Smith

Smith is Director of the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, one of the oldest law school clinical programs in the country. Prior to joining Maine Law she was a law clerk for Chief Judge Gene Carter of the U.S. District Court for the District of Maine, and practiced with the Portland law firm of Drummond Woodsum & MacMahon.
Impact
In 2016, more than 6,000 Mainers were homeless at some time during the year, spending a total of 327,346 bednights in the state’s 40 shelters. The Maine Homeless Legal Project provides support to homeless people for the legal problems they face.

By Barrett Littlefield, 
Maine Law class of 2018

Before and during my first year of law school I had the privilege of working with the Maine Homeless Legal Project (MHLP). A joint effort between the Volunteer Lawyers Project and the Preble Street Resource Center, MHLP connects people experiencing homelessness with legal advice and extended, pro bono representation. This summer, I built upon that work by representing juvenile clients as a student attorney at the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic. Both organizations are vital to overcoming our state’s struggle to ensure access to justice for all Mainers.

Our nation’s access to justice crisis – acutely felt in Maine where 1 out of every 3 adults lacks the necessary income to afford basic needs – is about more than charity and poverty. Access to justice is about education, implicit bias, class solidarity, and the future of the legal profession. An efficient and accessible justice system requires a diverse bar, committed to progressive self-education. Moreover, members of the bench and bar must convey to the public the role of the legal profession in promoting society’s greatest goals – humanity and equal justice.

As a law student, my experience at Maine Law and in the Clinic is an obvious win-win situation: I get incomparable experience and education by pursuing my passion, while helping others in the process. Whether you are a law student or have been practicing for decades, providing legal representation to people living at the margins of society is a duty we all must recognize. That duty is why I chose to attend law school and why I will be devoted to the legal profession in service to my community.

About Barrett Littlefield
Raised by working class parents in rural Maine, Littlefield is a third year student at the University of Maine School of Law. He is a passionate advocate for people living at the margins of society. Most recently, Littlefield has worked as a student attorney at Maine Law’s Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic.
This summer, Maine Law launched the Rural Lawyer Project, a program designed to introduce our students to the practice of law in rural and small town communities that may otherwise have limited access to legal services. This is the first year of a three-year pilot, with funding for up to four students next summer and the year following, in communities around the state.

The project is a collaboration between the Law School, the Maine Justice Foundation, the Maine Board of Overseers of the Bar, and the Maine State Bar Association. Thanks to funding from the Justice Foundation, and support from our other partner organizations, as well as from lawyers and judges near and far, two Maine Law students—fresh off their first year of law school—headed north to spend the summer gaining valuable experience with firms in Aroostook County. Cameron Goodwin was a fellow with Smith & Associates Law Office, and Ryan Rutledge was a fellow with Bemis & Rossignol.

The roots of this project began with the Board of Overseers of the Bar’s Task Force to study bar demographics, continued with the Board’s Transitioning Lawyers’ Council, and culminated with the Justice Foundation’s funding of this project. This has truly been a community effort.

The Rural Lawyer Project has special meaning to me because of the unique challenges and opportunities presented by changing bar demographics in our rural communities, an evolving employment market, and the significant access to justice issues that emerge when lawyers disappear from communities. I have worked with countless members of the bench and bar. I am deeply grateful for their support, hard work, and commitment to ensuring access to justice for the people of Maine.

By Rachel Reeves, J.D. ’01
Director of Field Placement Programs

Impact

The Rural Lawyer Project helps address legal needs that go unmet when lawyers in rural Maine retire. Approximately 1,000 of Maine’s 3,700 practicing lawyers are age 60 or older. In the state’s five most rural counties, more than half of the lawyers are 60 or older.

About Rachel Reeves

A graduate of the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine School of Law, Reeves worked as an attorney in private practice before joining Maine Law in 2011.
We joined the Apps for Justice Project because we had a unique opportunity to work with Professor Lois Lupica. Her project explored how technology can help two important constituencies: people facing legal problems where lawyers traditionally are not available/affordable, and attorneys serving low to moderate-income clients who are trying to build more efficient practices.

Tenants facing eviction or cut off utilities usually do not have the money to hire an attorney. Applications like Rights of Tenants in Maine help educate our residents about their legal rights in these situations, using plain language and clear presentation. Further, attorneys are serving a large volume of clients, the latter often paying discounted rates. These attorneys can only continue to serve their clients if they adopt technology to make their practices more efficient. Tools like Maine Family Law Intake shift time-consuming tasks like form completion to clients, helping attorneys focus on tasks that require legal expertise.

While it remains the ideal, it is sadly unrealistic to expect universal access to a lawyer. When legal problems arise, we want projects like Apps for Justice to be a light in the tunnel, to help guide people through the legal process and achieve better results than they could on their own.

Working on Apps for Justice was incredibly fulfilling for both of us, and exposed us to a vibrant, growing field. We would encourage interested law students and practicing lawyers to consider how investing in legal technology can both enhance their careers and the legal community at large.

About Toby Franklin (left) and Sage Friedman

Under the supervision of Professor Lois R. Lupica, Maine Law students (and 2017 graduates) Franklin and Friedman were the primary developers of Apps for Justice, a technology-based approach for helping low and moderate-income Mainers with civil legal problems.

Franklin was recently selected to be an inaugural NextGen Fellow with the American Bar Association Center for Innovation. Friedman was recently hired by Murray, Plumb & Murray.