

# The Pro Bono Collaborative



Law firms, law students, and the community  
working to serve the unmet legal needs of  
low-income Rhode Islanders

Roger Williams University School of Law  
Rhode Island

## Who We Are

### The PBC and Its Collaborators

The PBC partners law firms, community service providers, and RWU law students on discrete projects to provide pro bono legal services to Rhode Island's underrepresented and underserved individuals, families, and communities. Our mission is to increase the number of major firm attorneys doing pro bono work, to support law firms and community-based service providers in forging strong and self-sustaining relationships, and to complement the existing pro bono work of R.I. Legal Services and the R.I. Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyer Program.

## Why We Do It

### Formation of the PBC

#### **Several forces informed the creation of the PBC:**

- \* National and local statistics indicating that a majority of the legal needs of the poor remain unmet;
- \* A law school-sponsored Racial Justice Colloquium that brought together diverse community leaders who expressed an overwhelming need for additional pro bono legal services in Rhode Island;
- \* A 2005 law school-conducted survey in which R.I. attorneys indicated that administrative support, student assistance, and training in the areas of law that impact the low-income population would greatly facilitate their participation in pro bono work.

**In 2005, the law school sought and received a generous grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. In January, 2006, the law school launched the PBC.**

## How We Do It—

### Structure of the PBC

The PBC provides a solid infrastructure for attorneys and law students to bring much needed legal services to their community. The creation of a PBC project involves many steps, including:

- Meeting with firms to identify their needs, abilities, and limitations;
- Meeting with individual community organizations to identify possible legal assistance projects;
- Developing discrete legal assistance projects while considering the firms' talents, the community organizations' needs, and the law students' skills;
- Facilitating meetings of the law firm attorneys, community service providers, and law students;
- Arranging and hosting issue-specific legal training for the attorneys, law students, and service providers;
- Overseeing all projects and facilitating communication among the PBC partners until projects can become self-sustaining;
- Identifying potential RWU School of Law faculty members and other legal experts to support and consult on the projects.

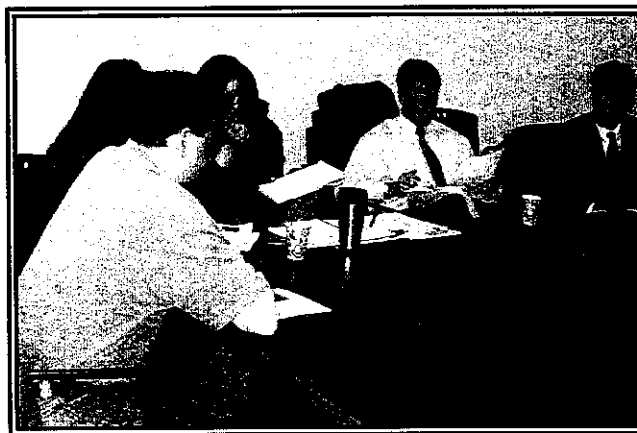
The PBC emphasizes prevention by working toward systemic change, providing legal education, intervention, assistance, and advocacy, with the hope of empowering people and remediating issues before they require court involvement, but providing direct presentation when needed.

# What People are Saying About the PBC

“The PBC is a welcome addition to Rhode Island’s pro bono community,” says **Rhode Island Supreme Court 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.”

“This was an obvious grant opportunity for the [R.I.] 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.”

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.”



## What We Do—PBC Projects

The PBC provides creative opportunities for attorneys from the state's top law firms and in-house corporate counsel, with the support of RWU law students, to deliver pro bono legal services in partnership with community-based service providers. The PBC currently oversees three projects.

### *Special Education Advocacy Project*

**Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP** attorneys and RWU law students work with Casey Family Services' and Meeting Street School's Early Intervention clients, providing education and assistance to parents of at-risk special needs children.

Attorneys and law students advocate on behalf of these parents, provide representation at Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings, and deliver rights education workshops for parents and staff.

### *Affordable Housing Project*

**Brown Rudnick Berlack Israels LLP** attorneys and RWU law students are working with Church Community Housing Corporation to implement the new Inclusionary Zoning Law, which requires ten percent of newly developed housing units be set aside as affordable. Having already conducted exhaustive research, attorneys and students are drafting legal and legislative documents that will ensure successful realization of the Statewide Community Housing Land Trust, thereby helping facilitate the future purchase of hundreds of units by low-income families.

### *Legal Rights Workshop Project*

**Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge** attorneys and RWU law students are working with Children's Friend & Service R.I. to provide rights education for parents. Workshops, presented in both English and Spanish, focus on such vital matters as housing, immigration, healthcare, and domestic violence.

**Eliza Vorenberg, J.D., PBC Director**, brings to the PBC experience in a wide variety of public interest law settings. She has represented plaintiffs in civil rights and employment discrimination cases. She has assisted low income families as a staff attorney at the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law in South Central Los Angeles and was a fellow at the Center for Law in the Public Interest. Prior to law school, Eliza was a benefits and housing advocate at Greater Boston Legal Services. She holds a B.A. in history from Bryn Mawr College and a J.D. from Columbia Law School. Eliza can be reached at 401-254-4597 or [evorenberg@rwu.edu](mailto:evorenberg@rwu.edu).

**Leslie Ann Gifford, PBC Administrative Coordinator**, comes to the PBC with a lengthy public interest and communications background. A former journalist, Leslie has spent most of her career in the non-profit world. A seasoned and successful grant writer, she is a passionate advocate for the underserved. She holds a B.A. in economics from New York University. Leslie can be reached at 401-254-4559 or [lgifford@rwu.edu](mailto:lgifford@rwu.edu).

## **Roger Williams University**

RALPH R. PAPITTO SCHOOL OF LAW

### **The Feinstein Institute for Legal Service**

Roger Williams University School of Law  
Ten Metacom Avenue, Bristol, R.I. 02809

Toll Free: (800) 633-2727

Tel. (401) 254-4500

Fax (401) 254-3525