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SCHOOL OF LAW
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA



TO: Law & Justice Interim Committee
FROM: Paul F. Kirgis, Dean
RE: Blewett School of Law Access to Justice & Pro Bono Initiatives
DATE: November 3, 2017

The Blewett School of Law at the University of Montana has a long history of providing legal services to the Montana community through our extensive clinical program. This year, we expanded our in-house clinics by launching a Veterans Advocacy Clinic that grew out of the pro bono representation of veterans by Professor Hillary Wandler. Students in the Veterans Advocacy Clinic work on a range of legal issues on behalf of Montana's veterans, including disability compensation claims, appeals to the Board of Veterans Appeals and the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, character of discharge determinations by the VA, and discharge upgrade applications and appeals.

The law school also works with other institutions around Montana to promote access to justice generally. Law school representatives on the Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission have played an integral role in both the rural practice/incubator project, designed to increase the number of lawyers in currently underserved communities, and the E-RAMP mediation project, designed to reduce the backlog of pro se divorce cases by training lawyers to perform pro bono family mediation. The School of Law also has four representatives on the Western Montana Bar Association Pro Bono Committee – a full-time faculty member, two students appointed by the Student Bar Association, and the Law School Pro Bono Coordinator.

More directly in the area of pro bono, the School of Law supports two major Pro Bono initiatives: a Pro Bono Program that facilitates student, staff and faculty Pro Bono Service; and a monthly Low Income Family Law Clinic that provides direct legal services to low-income Montanans. These are described below.

Professional Responsibility Pro Bono Project (2015, 2016, 2017) → School of Law Pro Bono Program

In 2015 the School of Law instituted a Pro Bono Project as a component of Professional Responsibility, a required course for second year law students. The Professional Responsibility Pro Bono Project incentivized students to engage in limited pro bono work in conjunction with their coursework. The School of Law is in the process of sun-setting the Professional Responsibility Pro Bono Project and replacing it with an institutionally-supported, yearlong Pro Bono Program. To support this process, the School of Law, in collaboration with Montana Legal Services Association and the Family Law Section of the State Bar, created a dedicated Pro Bono Coordinator position at the School of Law. The Law School Pro Bono Coordinator position began in August 2017. It is currently filled by an AmeriCorps Service Member, who is under the direct supervision of a full-time law faculty member. The Pro Bono Coordinator's primary focus is to build on the Professional Responsibility Pro Bono Project to make it a sustainable school-wide Program. The Pro Bono Coordinator will identify, promote, and coordinate pro

bono placements for first, second and third year law students, and for staff and faculty throughout the academic year and the summer.

The primary goal of the Program is to support the development of student awareness of their professional obligation to engage in pro bono legal service and to provide hands-on learning opportunities for students. The Program focuses on the promotion and development of professional legal values. Thus, it is limited to legal work; it does not include non-legal volunteer work. In 2015, 2016, and 2017, second year law students contributed over 300 hours of pro bono service to the community each Spring semester as part of the Professional Responsibility Project. Students provided legal assistance to established organizations like Montana Legal Services Association, Missoula Family Law Self Help Center, and Crime Victims Advocate, as well as assisting individual practitioners in a wide range of matters, including a Ninth Circuit appeal of an immigration order, drafting IRS documents to establish a non-profit, advising a hunters and anglers non-profit organization on tax and access issues, and end-of-life document preparation for indigent elder Montanans. With the new Pro Bono Program, we expect to extend both the geographical reach and subject matter variety of work students are able to.

Law School Monthly Low Income Family Law Clinic

In 2016, the School of Law began hosting a monthly Low Income Family Law Clinic during the academic year (except January) in partnership with Montana Legal Services Association and the Western Montana Bar Association Pro Bono Committee. The Law School Clinic operates as a satellite clinic for Montana Legal Services Association, which screens and refers clients to the Law School Clinic. The Law School Clinic serves clients who cannot be timely served at the monthly Montana Legal Services Association Downtown Clinic.

In Academic Year 2016-2017, the School of Law hosted eight Clinics that served a total of 74 low income Montanans. The Law School Clinic provides volunteer pro bono opportunities for up to five law students. At each Clinic, students perform client intake interviews, participate in the client counseling session, and debrief with the advising attorney following the appointment. The Law School Clinic is based on a teaching hospital model – client appointments are scheduled for 45 minutes (as opposed to 30 minutes at the Downtown Clinic) to create space for discussion and mentorship between the advising attorney and the student at the end of each client appointment. The Law School Clinic is immensely popular with students – more students seek to volunteer at each Clinic than can be accommodated.