

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin.

Serving the city's law profession since 1854

---

March 5, 2015

## With law clinic, Legal Prep to broaden reach

By Roy Strom  
Law Bulletin staff writer

There are 251 West Side high schoolers receiving a law-themed education this year at Legal Prep Charter Academy, which opened its doors in 2012.

Now, those students' parents and their West Garfield Park neighbors have access to real-life legal help through a monthly community law clinic the school began hosting in January.

A collaboration between the academy, the Public Interest Law Initiative and Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, the clinic is held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month.

It has so far provided legal advice related to custody and property disputes, bankruptcy filings, how to pursue nonprofit status for a church and what role lawyers play in purchasing a home.

"It's been a real mix of civil legal cases that we've seen so far," said [Michael G. Bergmann](#), PILI's executive director who spearheaded the clinic and attended both January and February sessions.

"Our goal is for this to get up and running and for the families of the students and folks in that community to know that this is a resource that's available to them if they need it."

The clinic is staffed by alumni of PILI programs that provide internships for law students and recent graduates with pro bono organizations.

PILI is also seeking law firms to "adopt" the clinic for a month by providing volunteer lawyers. Kirkland & Ellis LLP was the first to volunteer, staffing the November clinic with four to six attorneys.

The lawyers provide general legal advice and will represent clients in non-fee generating, non-class-action cases that might include family law, eviction, consumer debt, foreclosure, adult-child guardianship and more. CVLS staff will support the attorneys handling cases.

For Legal Prep, the clinic is indicative of the breadth of support the school has received from Chicago's legal community and an example of the connections it is trying to establish with its poverty-and-crime-stricken neighborhood.

The school has been sponsored by all six urban law schools. Its list of “founding partner” donors includes more than 20 of Chicago’s largest law firms, largest public companies and legal groups such as the Association of Corporate Counsel and The Chicago Bar Association.

Rather Stanton, development director and co-founder at Legal Prep, said the community law clinic is “one of the more important things that we do and are doing” for West Garfield Park and nearby neighborhoods.

“We offer a lot of different resources for the community — college training, we’ve done some financial literacy programs for adults — but I don’t know if anything we’ve done has been quite as pointed and impactful as this.”

PILI’s Bergmann said the idea was spurred by feedback he heard from the PILI Alumni Network Leadership Council, whose members said they wanted PILI to offer them more pro bono opportunities. Last year, it provided volunteers for events with the Center for Disability and Elder Law and the Domestic Violence Legal Clinic.

PILI does not represent clients directly; it partners with pro bono organizations such as CVLS by providing volunteers through its law firm-sponsored fellowships and internships.

Bergmann said the community law clinic has three goals.

“One is to be of service to those clients who need legal assistance and can’t afford it and help them connect with the justice system in an equitable way,” he said.

“And two, to have a way to really live up to our mission — and this program is a terrific example to our mission at work — which is to cultivate a lifelong commitment to pro bono law. The third is to support a school that I think has terrific people behind it and a really terrific mission.”

This is not Bergmann’s first involvement with the school. He previously spent three years on the American Bar Association’s Presidential Advisory Council on Diversity in the Legal Profession. In that role, he visited a charter school in New Mexico that offered some legal-themed education.

Legal Prep opened shortly after that visit. Bergmann reached out, attracted by the school’s long-term goal to foster a more diverse pipeline of students interested in the law.

He has been to the school multiple times and last year helped arrange a visit of more than 25 judges to the school from around the country.

“The need for diversity at the bench and bar is still so great that anything we can do to get (a positive view of the legal system) in the minds of youngsters and students is a great thing,” Bergmann said.

The next clinic, which accepts walk-ins, will be held Tuesday. Clinics will not be held in December or July because of vacations at the school.

©2015 by Law Bulletin Publishing Company. Content on this site is protected by the copyright laws of the United States. The copyright laws prohibit any copying, redistributing, or retransmitting of any copyright-protected material. The content is NOT WARRANTED as to quality, accuracy or completeness, but is believed to be accurate at the time of compilation. Websites for other organizations are referenced at this site; however, the Law Bulletin does

not endorse or imply endorsement as to the content of these websites. By using this site you agree to the [Terms, Conditions and Disclaimer](#). Law Bulletin Publishing Company values its customers and has a [Privacy Policy](#) for users of this website.