



The Post-Conviction Justice Project conducted parole readiness workshops at Calipatria State Prison.

CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES 2023

USC Gould
School of Law



“JUSTICE WARRIOR” FOR FREEDOM

PCJP’s Clinical Legal Fellow Danielle Wilkins (JD 2022) aims to bring parole readiness workshops to more people deserving of justice

By Julie Riggott

Since 1981, USC Gould’s Post-Conviction Justice Project (PCJP) has trained *justice warriors* to advocate for clients in state and federal prisons deserving of a second chance. Led by Director Heidi Rummel and Co-founder Michael Brennan, PCJP students have represented thousands of individuals at parole hearings and have helped pass landmark youth justice reforms.

One of those justice warriors is Danielle Wilkins (JD 2022), PCJP’s Clinical Legal Fellow for 2022-24, funded by the Kautz Family Foundation. Wilkins works with Rummel to bring more parole readiness workshops to California prisons, especially those farther from major cities, and offer consultations in Spanish.

The first workshops March 28 and 29 at Calipatria State Prison included a parole process overview, a mock parole hearing, one-on-one consultations with certified law students, and discussions with former PCJP clients who have been paroled. Eunice Bautista, PCJP senior case manager, conducted consultations in Spanish.

“With Eunice’s guidance, we are working toward capacity to present the entire program in Spanish because there are so few programs and rehabilitative opportunities for single-language Spanish speakers,” Wilkins says. “We want to reach people who are just beginning to think about the change necessary to be granted parole because it takes a lot of time to prepare for a hearing.”

Preparation includes understanding the parole process and working to rehabilitate through education, introspection, self-help programming and a commitment to nonviolence and sobriety — “so that when they are paroled, they will be ready for a new phase in life,” she says.

Partnering with Human Rights Watch and the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, PCJP has conducted workshops



Danielle Wilkins

for several years. “In addition to working with one or two clients over the course of the year, students will work with three to four clients during the workshops,” Wilkins says. “It allows them to think, ‘I have an hour and a half to assist a client I have never met. What strategies can I employ during our meeting to advance their parole preparation?’ And I think that’s a different muscle than they’re used to exercising when they’re working with clients long-term.”

Wilkins chose USC Gould for its tight-knit community focused on public interest work, supportive faculty and their impressive work toward prison reform. While a student, she participated in PCJP and Prof. Rummel and Prof. Elizabeth Calvin’s Legislative Policy Practicum and served as the pro bono co-chair and 3L advisor to the Barbara F. Bice Public Interest Law Foundation. Wilkins was honored by faculty, staff and students with the Miller-Johnson Equal Justice Prize in 2022.

Wilkins, who plans to pursue a career in criminal justice and prison reform, praises the PCJP for giving students an opportunity to apply what they’ve learned in law school with guidance. “I believe clinical education is the best way to bridge the gap between being a law student and becoming a lawyer,” she says. “It was by far the most impactful experience I had as a student.”



A FAMILY'S SAFE PASSAGE TO AMERICA

Ukrainians escape war with help from students in USC Gould's International Human Rights Clinic

By Leslie Ridgeway

The 2022 holidays were memorable to a Ukrainian family that escaped the ongoing war in Ukraine thanks in part to the USC Gould School of Law's International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC) and two student attorneys who did the legwork to bring this family to the United States.

"It's such a meaningful experience... you're making a difference in a family's life, using the skills we are developing to make even a small impact on a larger scale."

—3L HARUTYUN MARGARYAN

The Ukrainian family of four (including two children ages 6 and 2) landed Dec. 10 at Los Angeles International Airport, greeted by Henna Pithia (JD 2015), visiting clinical assistant professor with the IHRC and supervising attorney on this matter. Also present were members of an Orange County church sponsoring the family, plus members of Home for Refugees, a faith-based organization in Irvine, Calif. that helped IHRC get in touch with the sponsors to arrange for humanitarian parole for the young family and help them escape the war, now in its second year as of Feb. 24.

"One of the four focus areas of the IHRC is refugee rights," says Pithia of the clinic, founded in 2011 by Director, Professor Hannah Garry. "Another is accountability for atrocity situations. Our clinic is always adjusting and acting upon what is most urgent in light of the most pressing human rights concerns of the day. Combining these two focus areas with what's happening in Ukraine, it made sense to help this young family while another clinic team was simultaneously in The Hague at the International Criminal Court, with Professor Garry calling for accountability for the perpetration of atrocities that caused this family to flee."

For this Ukrainian family, the way out began with Uniting for Ukraine, a U.S. government program launched in April 2022 to streamline the humanitarian parole process and help Ukrainians escape the ongoing war. Through this program, applicants with qualified U.S. sponsors can live in the U.S. as parolees for two years. In the past, the parole application process has often been interminable and sometimes only granted for one year. The clinic welcomed the U.S. government's new program, which allowed the young family to escape the war in Ukraine in a timely manner. (The family is not being named for privacy concerns.)

2L Uma Fry Demetria and 3L Harutyun Margaryan worked with representatives at Home for Refugees who connected the clinic to U.S. sponsors that would eventually support the family through the parole process. Communicating across borders with the Ukrainian family, the students provided legal assistance by completing the online parole application form for each sponsor and each member of the family. Communication via Zoom was irregular, depending on what was happening in Kyiv, where the family was living amidst the ongoing war.



IHRC 2L Uma Fry Demetria, left and 3L Harutyun Margaryan.



The family arrives at Los Angeles International Airport from Ukraine.

"Our client was always unsure if he could make the meetings because he was often in bomb shelters with no electricity or Zoom connection," says Demetria. "We decided to continue communication through a secure, encrypted platform to make sure that we had a private line of communication with our clients as they fled Ukraine."

"It's very dangerous on a large scale — we constantly worried about whether the family would be the next target of Russian drone, missile, or rocket strikes," says Margaryan.

Relieved to remove his family from the war, the clinic's client said he appreciated that he could trust Demetria and Margaryan to properly handle the application process and get him and his family out quickly and safely.

"Harut and Uma are true professionals," he says. "I was very comfortable working with them on our case. The help I received from Harut and Uma on arranging humanitarian parole is invaluable. I thank them very much for that."

The church has assisted the family with housing and basic needs through fundraising, Pithia says. Before the two years of parole are up, the family will explore whether they should

apply for other forms of immigration relief, including asylum or another government program that may be developed in the future to assist them.

For the students, the outcome demonstrates the power of clinical work to change the lives of people uprooted by war — people often forgotten as the daily news cycle explodes minute by minute with shocking headlines.

"It's such a meaningful experience," says Margaryan. "You're making a difference in a family's life, using the skills we are developing to make even a small impact on a larger scale."

"When Russia's invasion happened, it blew up in the media right away, but people forget it's ongoing and has been impacting lives," says Demetria. "There's a stronger realization that they have jobs and family like everyone else when you're on Zoom with someone who is in the dark with their daughter on their lap."

Both Margaryan and Demetria plan to continue to work on important human rights issues after graduation. 



RELIEF FOR RENTERS

USC Gould Housing Policy and Law Clinic puts students into the community to deliver legal services to tenants at risk of losing their homes



Housing Law and Policy Clinic Director Deepika Sharma with HLPC students at Homeboy Industries, where they conducted pop-up clinics for Homeboy trainees with housing issues.

By Adriana Maestas

With over 64% of households in the City of Los Angeles occupied by renters and the Southern California region impacted by a national housing crisis, the USC Housing Law and Policy Clinic (HLPC) is in an important position to give students experience with advocacy for tenants and working with community groups and others to address local housing issues.

Under the guidance of Deepika Sharma, clinical assistant professor and director of the HLPC, five 2Ls and 3Ls, two 1L volunteers and three undergraduate students who speak fluent Spanish staff the clinic. HLPC, launched in 2022, employs a community lawyering model that emphasizes building relationships with tenants and collaborating with community groups to empower and uplift indigent tenants.

HLPC students partner with Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE), a South Los Angeles community-based organization dedicated to tenant rights advocacy and housing policy reform by serving clients at their weekly tenant action clinic, as well as supporting a monthly tenant harassment clinic. To date, HLPC has provided direct services to over 125 tenants, most of whom are monolingual Spanish speakers and families with children living in South LA.

2L Havyn Quigley says she appreciates the opportunity to be on the ground floor of a new clinic focused on one of the most critical public issues in Los Angeles.

"There's a big need for help in the housing space in Los Angeles because most people have been or are renters," she says. "Many tenants don't know their rights and often face harassment."

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—HAVYN QUIGLEY, 2L

Other HLPC projects include Know Your Rights workshops on renter’s rights. The clinic has presented on two occasions to 130 students and community members, conducted pop-up clinics at Homeboy Industries, supporting Homeboy’s trainees with housing issues, and is working on housing policy reform at the local level.

Sharma’s goal for the clinic is to expose students to the multiple factors affecting tenants, from language barriers to market pressures, discrimination, harassment, and public health emergencies — and to help students understand their impact as attorneys in advocating for housing justice.

“I hope to instill the idea of working alongside your client, rather than serving as an expert who is above them. In HLPC we are dedicated to supporting our client’s agency in a way that we hope allows them to use their own voice when asserting the law,” she says. 

HLPC students help their clients identify resources and understand complex housing laws, assist with drafting letters to landlords and, in some cases, make legal referrals. As the March 31 expiration date for COVID-19 protections approached, students worked on making tenants aware of the 12-month deadline to pay back rent and available resources to help them with payment.

For 2L Lo Wong, the one-on-one experience of working with a client — a man with a disability living in a West Hollywood apartment for the past 20 years — demonstrated the impact she and the legal profession can have on people’s lives.

“It’s been tough for him to gain employment, and he was unable to enroll in the Section 8 voucher program, as these programs are quite competitive due to high demand,” says Wong. “He was also having issues with his SSI application, so I helped link him to Disability Rights California and local resources available for rental assistance. But it was not until when I assured him that he doesn’t have to worry about the back rent until next February because of the city’s COVID emergency renter protections, that I heard him sigh with a real sense of relief.”

To further clarify the legal protections available to tenants, HLPC students are developing charts and templates in English and Spanish.

Like many clinics, the HPLC gives students an opportunity to exercise their passions for social justice. For 3L Andrew Freire, that passion is language access. Freire, who speaks Spanish, plans to advocate for better language access within unjust systems after graduation.

“Before I went to law school, I volunteered as an interpreter for tenants,” he says. “Through that experience, I became aware of how language accessibility is an important part of creating access to justice. It’s been rewarding to translate housing law rights for tenants when they receive illegal eviction notices or coercive letters from their landlords. In response, we carefully draft bilingual letters or interpret government agency communications from English to Spanish so that tenants can learn about the specific housing issues they are confronting and effectively advocate for themselves.”



BUILDING QUALITY LEGAL SKILLS



Carson Scott



Emma Burgoon

USC Immigration Clinic alumni reflect on career-shaping experiences

By Carren Jao

For more than 20 years, the USC Gould School of Law's Immigration Clinic has represented individuals seeking asylum and other humanitarian protection in the United States. Professor Niels Frenzen and Professor Jean Reisz, the clinic's co-directors, supervise law students in their second and third years to provide affordable, high-quality legal representation to clients, including USC students and staff, and immigrant children through a partnership with Children's Hospital Los Angeles. The students' work is a matter of ensuring a client's safety.

"Immigration laws are complex and, regardless of who is president, immigration enforcement practices have been harsh in recent years," says Frenzen. "Having an Immigration Clinic student represent a client under the supervision of a clinical faculty member frequently means that the client will not be deported to a place of danger, will not be separated from family and will be granted legal status in the United States."

Two recent graduates are among the hundreds of law students whose ambitions led them to USC Gould and the Immigration Clinic. Carson Scott (JD 2020) and Emma Burgoon (JD 2022), whose mothers are from Mexico, have first-hand experience with assumptions about their parents' backgrounds that prompted them to pursue law careers.

Scott works at Immigrant Defenders Law Center in Los Angeles, co-founded by Executive Director Lindsay Toczyłowski (JD 2008), also an Immigration

Clinic alum. At ImmDef, Scott handles children's immigration cases and impact litigation cases that give her an opportunity to work toward policy changes in immigration.

As a 1L, Scott worked weekends in the clinic's naturalization programs, providing free legal support for those interested in becoming naturalized citizens. When she formally joined the clinic as a 2L, her work ranged from merit hearings, arguing on behalf of two women detained at Adelanto Detention Center, successfully representing a client during a bond hearing and winning the client's release, and drafting a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals appellate brief application for a client's deferral of removal under the Convention Against Torture.

"Getting that experience and being trained to provide a certain level of quality of representation is really special," Scott says. "It is something I carry with me and expect to give each case, each filing I handle."

Burgoon, who also volunteered with the clinic in her first year, says she gained important experience with juggling multiple cases, and enhanced her writing skills. Her work included writing briefs and motions, helping to write a Ninth Circuit petition for a client and filing Freedom of Information Act requests for clients.

"I got a lot of early exposure to great legal skills that I'm carrying over now to my job," says Burgoon, now an associate at Morrison Foerster LLP working on privacy and data security cases with plans to use her Immigration Clinic skills on pro bono cases. 



COMPOSING A CONTRACT

With Small Business Clinic, 3L Bryce Bark helps a small Los Angeles symphony with legal details

By Greg Hardesty

Helping a small symphony in Los Angeles legally form as a business in 2022 hit the right note for 3L Bryce Bark.

As a participant in USC Gould School of Law's Small Business Clinic, Bark was assigned to assist South Side Symphony founder and songwriter/composer/musician Marcus Norris form a company and draft independent contractor agreements with the musicians he hires to perform his works. For Bark, who begins her career after graduation at the San Diego office of Morrison Foerster LLP, the assignment was eye-opening in more ways than one.

"It was really interesting to learn about [Marcus'] work," Bark says. "And he was great to work with because he was very responsive and asked the right questions."

Under the mentorship of Michael Chasalow, clinical professor of law and director of the SBC, Bark worked with Norris to form an LLC with S corporation status — a designation that can be beneficial for small business owners responsible to pay large amounts of self-employment taxes, such as Social Security and Medicare taxes.

In forming the LLC, Bark had to understand the role of, and navigate filings with the California Secretary of State and the IRS. In drafting the contract for the symphony, Bark became familiar with the nuances of recent state law concerning independent contractors. The contract included some intellectual property concerns since Norris owns the music he composes. The work gave Bark experience with assessing a client's needs and translating those needs into contractual provisions.

"You have to think about all the good and bad outcomes that might occur and the effects of the words you draft in the legal documents," she says. "[Norris] brings in individuals to perform his music in large



Bryce Bark

settings, so it's different from a normal band with everyone playing consistently. It comes with a lot of moving parts."

The value of the SBC's legal services range between \$12,000 and \$25,000 — a great deal for clients who could not otherwise afford the caliber of legal services provided by the clinic.

Chasalow says Bark succeeded by paying attention to the distinctive needs presented by Norris' business.

"Bryce did a fantastic job on this matter," he says. "There were a number of subtle and unique issues that needed to be addressed because a symphony is not a typical client and does not have typical needs. Bryce handled these issues with insight, creativity, expertise and great professionalism. Her work on this matter was at level of many second-year associates."

As Bark sets off as an attorney, she can already count one happy client in Norris.

"Bryce was amazing and insightful," he says. "She not only helped me with the things I went to her for, but identified other areas she could help me with that I didn't even know I was in need of." 



AN EQUITABLE SOLUTION

Mediation Clinic students gain experience working on federal employee cases for Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

By Adriana Maestas

A long-standing partnership between USC Gould School of Law's Mediation Clinic and the Los Angeles office of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission gives Gould students an opportunity to work with an influential alumna and helps the EEOC manage its workload.



Hon. Diane Gross (second from left) with (from left) Mark Lemke (JD 2000), Professor Lisa Klerman, Martin Sullivan (JD 2010) and Angela Reddock-Wright, who provide supervision to Mediation Clinic students.

The Hon. Diane Gross (JD 1993), a supervising administrative judge for the L.A. office of the EEOC, has been assigning cases to students in the Mediation Clinic since 2018, as one of several pools of mediators. Under clinic supervision, the students pore through lengthy investigative reports to prepare for and then conduct the mediations.

"It has been a great partnership for us because we have such a high volume of cases, and we don't always have the staffing needed to devote as much attention to mediation as would be optimal," says Gross. "It's wonderful to have this resource of USC law students to help us with our caseload. In turn, they gain the

experience of resolving actual discrimination cases and mediating real employment discrimination disputes."

The Mediation Clinic's work with the EEOC involves federal employees who have a special administrative process for their discrimination cases, most of them dealing with race, gender, sexual harassment, disability, age discrimination and retaliation. It is challenging work — administrative judges typically review investigative reports as long as 1,000 pages, including exhibits and affidavits, to understand the factual background. The Los Angeles office alone has hundreds of cases pending with federal employees and agencies seeking resolution.

"We appreciate how Judge Gross is letting us handle these higher-level cases, and we know that she's appreciative that we are easing some of the workload. There's a mutual respect and mutual gratitude in how we work with Judge Gross and the EEOC," says 3L Danny Costandy.

3L Brian Lam says working with the EEOC has given him a clearer perspective of the resolution process in the federal government. While Lam is interested in pursuing a career in criminal law, mediating the EEOC cases has exposed him to the civil and administrative process, and, importantly, experience working directly with the disputants.

"I'm learning a lot about how to listen to two parties who work in the same agency," he says. "A lot of times, we're dealing with clashing personalities, and people who aren't communicating in the most straightforward way. Our job is to help the parties come to an equitable solution."

Students work under the supervision of USC Gould Professor and Mediation Clinic Director Lisa Klerman, as well as Gould lecturers in law Martin Sullivan (JD 2010), Mark Lemke (JD 2000) and Angela Reddock-Wright.

Klerman is proud of what her students have accomplished. "The skills they gain that make them highly effective mediators are the same skills that give them a leg up as they begin their legal careers." 



Eric Fram

CLINICAL CONNECTIONS

Intellectual Property and Technology Law Clinic brings student, alumnus together for employment opportunity

By Greg Hardesty

Eric Fram was in his third year at the USC Gould School of Law when he heard something that crystallized his vision of his future.

It was a talk by Chris Perez (JD 2009), a partner in the boutique entertainment law firm Donaldson Callif Perez LLP, which specializes in representing independent producers of film, TV and web-based content on such issues as copyright, trademark and personal rights issues. During the lecture, sponsored by the Latinx Law Student Association, Perez touched on his time at the Intellectual Property and Technology Law Clinic, which Fram belonged to, as well as the focus of his firm, on clients aspiring to make the world a better place through creative works.

Fram had explored public service with summer internships with Holocaust Survivor Services and Elder Justice team of Bet Tzedek Legal Services and the California Department of Justice's civil division, but Perez' firm sounded like a place where he could support efforts to improve society on the creative side.

"The more he talked, the more he sounded like me — what I wanted to do," says Fram.

Last fall, after earning his JD and certificate in media and entertainment law (MET) from USC, he began reporting to one of his new bosses: Chris Perez. At DCP, Fram is now supporting independent creatives to execute their visions by protecting their expressive rights.

"This law firm really checked all the boxes for me," he says. "And the experience I got in the clinic was a very close mirror to what I actually do day to day at the firm."

A CHANCE TO MAKE AN IMPACT

Fram says his year in the IPTLC, which is run by Professor Jef Pearlman, gave him invaluable experience in providing a range of intellectual property-related services for the clinic's clients – most of them documentary filmmakers, including one who made a film about a local theater company. Perez, too, not only gained important experience but also met his future business partner through IPTLC.

Back in 2008, Perez worked with then-IPTLC director Professor Jack Lerner on a long-term project with pro bono counsel Michael Donaldson (now Perez's partner) to secure an exemption from the Digital Millennium Copyright Act for documentary filmmakers looking to take advantage of fair use.

"It was the most challenging project of my professional life, but it was by far the most rewarding," Perez says. "Aside from landing a job with Donaldson, it also gave me the confidence that I could make a real, discernible impact with a law degree."

Pearlman says he strives to make the clinic an opportunity for students to not only gain hands-on experience but to align themselves with the kind of work they hope to do after law school.

"Eric represents what we hope for in our clinic program: giving our clients great service, helping our students find their own path, and preparing them to do well by doing good as lawyers," he says. 