



The USC International Human Rights Clinic traveled to Kyrgyzstan in December 2023 to complete a report as part of the Clooney Foundation for Justice's TrialWatch Initiative.

CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES 2024



ASYLUM ACHIEVED

Immigration Clinic law student Jaya Loharuka wins a sensitive case for an Ethiopian woman seeking asylum in the U.S.

By Diane Krieger

Third-year law student Jaya Loharuka calls her work in USC Gould School of Law's Immigration Clinic "the best and most fulfilling part of my experience at Gould."

In a life-changing case, Loharuka was able to win asylum for a woman from Ethiopia.

Testifying that she had been tortured and sexually assaulted in her homeland because her father was a political dissident, the Ethiopian woman was facing deportation from the U.S.

Loharuka had her back.

Loharuka, who graduated in May, appeared on the record before an immigration judge and conducted the hearing in December 2023 that would determine the 34-year-old's fate.

Over the course of the four-hour asylum hearing, Loharuka answered all questions from the judge, conducted the client's direct examination, and delivered the closing argument. She was supervised by clinical co-director and USC Gould Professor Niels Frenzen, an attorney specializing in immigration and refugee law.

In a bench ruling, the judge ended up granting the woman asylum — despite questioning the veracity of some of the woman's claims.

Representing the Ethiopian woman in court was the kind of golden opportunity provided to second- and third-year law students who are accepted into the Immigration Clinic, which provides high-quality pro-bono legal representation to clients.

TWO-YEAR FELLOWSHIP

Loharuka, the daughter of two physicians who immigrated from India and the first in her family to go into law, will continue enjoying the fruits of working at the Immigration Clinic.



Jaya Loharuka

As a recipient of the prestigious Immigrant Justice Corps fellowship, she will work full time at the clinic for two years after she earns her law degree.

"I really wanted to be able to stay at the clinic," Loharuka says. "It's a unique opportunity."

And although many of Loharuka's fellow graduating law students will be stepping into jobs that will pay triple her salary, she wouldn't have it any other way.

"This type of legal victory — assuring this woman, for the first time in six years, is not going to be deported somewhere where she will face certain harm, torture or death, makes the whole thing worth it for me," Loharuka says.

HIGH-IMPACT CASES

Loharuka got interested in law when she was an undergraduate at UCLA, where she majored in American Literature with a minor in Civic Engagement, a new program that focuses on how public policies affect local communities.

Before joining USC Gould, she completed an internship at the Compton Courthouse, where she assisted people in divorce, child custody, and eviction cases who couldn't afford to hire an attorney and had to represent themselves.

"I've learned a lot of valuable lessons at the USC Immigration Clinic about how to properly communicate with clients and manage their expectations during difficult times," Loharuka says of her time at USC Gould. "These people face a system completely rigged against them, so it's important for me to be in a position of continually advocating for them." 🗡️



A SECOND-CHANCE SENTENCE

Post-Conviction Justice Project 3L student and legal fellow help client earn freedom through new California law

By Melissa Masatani

For most people, New Year's Day simply marks the beginning of a new calendar year. But this year, January 1 meant something very different for Tony Huynh, as a law came into effect in California that led him to USC Gould School of Law's Post-Conviction Justice Project (PCJP) and to newfound freedom.

"AB 600 gives judges discretion to resentence incarcerated people, such that the 'interests of justice' may be served by reducing inequitable, disparate sentences," says Danielle Wilkins (JD 2022), PCJP's clinical legal fellow. "Judge Daniel J. Lowenthal received a letter from Tony (Huynh) on January 2nd, the day after the law went into effect. Mr. Huynh's rehabilitation and accomplishments impressed the court, so he scheduled the case for a hearing and contacted PCJP."

Led by Co-Directors Heidi Rummel and Michael Parente (JD 2012), PCJP is a clinical program at USC Gould that trains law students to advocate for their clients at parole hearings, post-conviction habeas and resentencing petitions, and parole readiness workshops in prisons. Wilkins has spent the past two years working with the clinic as a

fellow, expanding PCJP's in-prison workshop offerings and supporting students representing clients.

For Huynh's case, PCJP had two weeks to present mitigation evidence and witnesses at a resentencing hearing, so Wilkins teamed up with 3L Shelby Enman, one of PCJP's advanced students.

"I am interested in post-conviction work and so this case was really incredible to work on," Enman says. "The client was amazing to work with and it was fascinating to learn the nuts and bolts of judge-initiated resentencings."

Enman, who will be working in the Los Angeles Public Defender's office post-graduation, says her experience working with Huynh's resentencing and her two years with PCJP has been influential in her aim to pursue public interest work.

"The criminal justice legal system moves so slowly and it's a long process working with parole clients," she says. "But it was only a few weeks between when we started working on the resentencing hearing and when we met the client as he walked out of the prison gates. It was life-changing for him and exciting for me to see the court and the District Attorney's Office

recognize his hard work to rehabilitate."

Although the new law grants judges broad discretion to consider resentencing, Wilkins says challenges remain for those who are waiting for an opportunity to present their case to a court.

"By doing this work, PCJP is filling a need for indigent representation that exists right now in L.A. County and beyond," Wilkins says. "It is affirming when new opportunities to advocate for justice arise. Our ability to take advantage of them, and help achieve freedom for our clients, is a credit to Professor Heidi Rummel, who prepares and supports student lawyers to take on the challenge." 🗡️



From left, Danielle Wilkins, Post-Conviction Justice Project former client Tony Huynh and 3L PCJP student Shelby Enman pose for a photo at the clinic's annual Freedom and Tacos Party.



REPORT CARD

International Human Rights Clinic partners with the Clooney Foundation for Justice TrialWatch Initiative to assess human rights proceedings in Kyrgyzstan

By Melissa Masatani

The USC Gould School of Law International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC), in partnership with the Clooney Foundation for Justice TrialWatch Initiative, has published a report on its fair trial rights findings for a human rights defender in Kyrgyzstan. The report, which was released on April 4, is a culmination of three years of work by the clinic's law students, who monitored trial proceedings for Kamil Ruziev, a human rights defender based in Kyrgyzstan's Issyk-Kul region. The report gives the trial a grade of C, citing multiple due process violations that resulted from a politically motivated case against Ruziev.

"A report of this length and intensity is not insignificant, and it has been a team effort to produce a comprehensive picture of Kamil Ruziev's forgery trial as well as the political and legal climate surrounding proceedings," says Professor Henna Pithia, Interim Director of the International Human Rights Clinic.

Pithia, who is a visiting clinical assistant professor of law at USC Gould, traveled in December 2023 to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan with 3L Pieter Keushkerian,

2L Mariam Daoud and Steve Swerdlow, the expert reviewer for the recently released report and a human rights lawyer and an associate professor of the practice of political science and international relations at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. The group met with Ruziev as well as government officials, the United Nations, the diplomatic community, and human rights activists during their visit, giving them the opportunity to gain on-the-ground expertise that informed the final report.

"It was clear from the reaction of (Ruziev), his family and colleagues, that they were impressed with the clinic, its students, and their determination and focus to see through a difficult report like this," Swerdlow says. "A few of the reasons I find this report is so important is that it will create an important record for historical posterity of the individual violations in this case, shed light on the broader challenges human rights defenders in Central Asia face, and ultimately serve as a call to action for the Kyrgyz government to uphold human rights and make Ruziev whole."

"A report of this length and intensity is not insignificant, and it has been a team effort to produce a comprehensive picture of Kamil Ruziev's forgery trial as well as the political and legal climate surrounding proceedings" —PROFESSOR HENNA PITHIA



From left, Henna Pithia, Steve Swerdlow, Kamil Ruziev, Pieter Keushkerian and Mariam Daoud meet in Kyrgyzstan in December.

The clinic began its work on this case in 2020, having agreed to work with the TrialWatch Initiative to monitor the proceedings and issue a report. Despite the challenges of monitoring a trial in Kyrgyzstan, translating reams of documents from Russian, and learning the intricacies of legal procedure in a post-Soviet context, the team of students (spanning 2020 to present) dedicated countless hours to issue their findings.

“True human rights education means being in the field and being in contact with primary sources, so it’s extraordinary that Professor Pithia was able to make this trip a reality and ensure that the students had firsthand experience meeting with high-ranking officials in addition to human rights activists when producing this report,” Swerdlow says. “I was impressed that the clinic was willing to take on a project for a country that rarely makes the headlines, and on behalf of an activist far from Kyrgyzstan’s capital who for 20 years has been doing his best to serve victims of domestic violence and torture in his far-flung region of the country.”

Keushkerian, whose interest in human rights law is rooted in his family’s experience as victims of human rights abuses, says that the trip to Bishkek “gave us a clearer understanding of what the future may hold for human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan. I came to law school with an interest in social justice lawyering, and working on Mr. Ruziev’s case has allowed me to put into practice skills that I have honed since the first day of law school.”

Daoud noted that meeting Ruziev and seeing his steadfast dedication to confronting human rights violations despite the past few years, was a reminder of the importance of remaining steadfast in advocacy for those in need, even when those efforts take years to bear fruit.

“Despite the slow progress and the long journey toward justice, he was adamant this work holds the potential for significant and far-reaching impacts,” she says. “His persistence is a testament to the importance of human rights work, reminding us that this work truly matters and that it will ultimately make a difference in someone’s life.”



PREPARED TO SOAR

Law student helps immigrant-owned small business ‘Saunter’ through life

By Carren Jao

Above right, sisters Alison and Joan Kim are the founders of Saunter, a small business that offers luxury footwear.

Positioned as a high-end luxury brand that offers comfortable smoking slippers for hardworking women, Saunter began as a dream business for first-generation Korean American sisters Joan and Alison Kim, but like many businesses, their primary concern was finances. “My biggest concern was the cost, like how would we even start a business?” Alison Kim says.

As part of setting up the business, Joan Kim figured legal considerations would cost the young company the most, so she dedicated herself to learning about the law by going to the L.A. Law Library, a community resource, which is where she learned about Michael Chasalow and the Small Business Clinic (SBC) he founded at USC Gould School of Law.

Through the clinic, the Kims were introduced to JD student Campbell Maier, a 2L who joined the program in 2023. A former president of the Fashion and Beauty Law club, Maier was a perfect fit for the needs of a young, ambitious, immigrant-owned company like Saunter. Saunter, in turn, provided a great opportunity for Maier to learn.

“The SBC is designed to provide ‘real world’ experiences for students,” says Chasalow, a clinical professor of law and director of the Small Business Clinic. While lessons at the clinic focus on practical things like forming LLCs or drafting agreements, the other part of the equation is to work with people. “A critical part of the education involves learning to work with a range of clients that have different personalities and different levels of sophistication and then to address the needs of those clients in a way that is useful and productive.”

It is a skill that Maier learned well partly because of the way the clinic was set up. “When you think about legal work, I think when you’ve never done it before, it sounds like a lot of reading and siloed activities. But Professor Chasalow really creates an environment where we can have discussions,” Maier says.



SAUNTER

Maier joined the clinic in the summer, in which the first two weeks were dedicated to training. After receiving an introduction on the legal needs of small businesses, each student is assigned different clients to work with and a caseload to manage. As students encounter different issues with their clients, they are encouraged to share their experiences and learnings with their cohort, as well as Chasalow, creating a learning environment with a very satisfying practical application.

Maier added that the clinic and the healthy conversations she’s had about what to do in certain cases has taught her a valuable skill in her profession: how to be comfortable learning — to voice her opinions and to listen to both the teacher and her colleagues. “Conversation is so helpful in understanding the broader picture. You become better when you work with clients, when you draft contracts, when you’re willing to put yourself out on a ledge with [Professor Chasalow]. Maybe something’s wrong, but you’ll learn why it’s wrong, and I think that’s really important,” Maier says.

The Kim sisters and Maier have worked for a year now on many aspects of Saunter, from working on its operating agreement to drafting photographer contracts. Saunter and Maier are now working on an influencer agreement, which the company is planning to use in its next phase: marketing. By providing a stable legal foundation through contracts and agreements, the company’s work with Maier and the Small Business Clinic has prepared Saunter to soar. Joan says, “We feel stable and protected.”



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Mediation Clinic students gain experience with youth in new collaboration

By Heidi Ried-Gonzaga

The USC Gould Mediation Clinic has started a new collaborative project in restorative justice. Third-year law student Teodora Cupac initiated this collaboration with Centinela Youth Services, Inc. (CYS) to expand opportunities within the clinic for law students to work with youth in the justice system.

“Restorative justice for youth seemed to be the last piece that was missing from the clinic’s mission,” Cupac says. She joined the mediation clinic as a 2L, is now in the Advanced Mediation Clinic as a 3L, and also serves as Professor Lisa Klerman’s teaching assistant.

“It has been in our vision plan for many years to develop a restorative justice program as part of our work in the Mediation Clinic,” says Klerman, clinical professor of law and director of the Mediation Clinic. “It allows us to be able to address disputes in a uniquely impactful way, to the benefit of the youth involved, those who were harmed, the USC mediators who learn valuable skills in the process, and the community at large. I am delighted to see it come to fruition.”

Soon after Cupac contacted CYS, they trained her as a Victim-Offender Restitution Services (VORS) mediator. VORS helps youth who have committed a criminal offense and the victim of their offense with the goal of providing restitution for the harm caused.

“It is about bringing humility back into the criminal justice system,” Cupac says. “This restorative process creates reflectiveness for the youth, space to forgive, and helps the community heal.”

The Mediation Clinic hopes to expand on this collaboration with CYS so that future clinic students can gain the same experience with restorative justice.

“CYS has greatly appreciated having Teodora mediate with our Restorative Justice Program,” says Richard Deleon, Centinela Youth Services Assistant Program Director. “Teodora’s passion for the work is demonstrated in how well she’s facilitated mediations as well as her commitment to her own growth as a mediator. CYS looks forward to further collaboration with USC’s Mediation Clinic and welcomes any students with the same commitment and passion as Teodora has demonstrated.”

Cupac has learned from her work with Centinela Youth Services that helping young people deal with the adversity associated with exposure to the criminal justice system has its challenges but is extremely rewarding in the end. “Both parties [youth and victim] are heard and come up with a resolution,” Cupac says. “These victims are minors and should be treated that way. The mistakes made as a youth don’t need to follow them through their whole life.”

Cupac already knew she wanted to be a litigator when she started law school, so it was natural that she joined the Mediation Clinic at Gould. As a graduating 3L this May, Cupac will work as a litigator on the business trials team at Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP in New York after she takes the bar exam this summer.

“I recommend involvement in the Mediation Clinic to any law student at Gould,” Cupac says. “Professor Klerman gives us opportunities that are unmatched with the cases we get to be involved in. This experience has taught me things that will stay with me after law school.” 🧠

Teodora Cupac





Kiara Jackson, Havyn Quigley and Lo Wong

PAVING THE WAY

Inaugural cohort reflects on two years of Housing Law and Policy Clinic

By Kaitlyn McQuown

USC Gould School of Law Housing Law and Policy Clinic (HLPC) was founded in the Fall of 2022, and since then has served more than 500 individuals through direct tenant legal services, Know Your Housing Rights workshops, direct community assessments and policy advocacy. The clinic has carried out a vision to serve low-income tenants in Los Angeles, primarily south of downtown, working alongside local organizations and local legal aid attorneys, organizers and council office staff members.

Founded by USC Gould Clinical Associate Professor of Law Deepika Sharma, JD Class of 2024 students Kiara Jackson, Havyn Quigley and Lo Wong are the first cohort of students who joined the HLPC at its inception.

“It’s been especially rewarding to see Kiara, Havyn and Lo grow from being students in their first year to growing into leaders in their last year,” Sharma says. “Over the past two years, in addition to witnessing them expertly navigate the complex statutory scheme of tenant protections, I saw each of them gain confidence in expressing their views on strategy and bringing their own voice to their individual cases.”

Quigley credits the clinic with being one of the most memorable parts of her time at USC Gould.

“Having the opportunity to work closely with a professor for two years has been integral to my law school experience. I truly feel like I have a mentor and someone I can come back to talk to even when I leave Gould,” Quigley says. “All the clinic students work as a team on everything that we do, and it has fostered such special relationships. What I will remember most looking back on law school are my experiences working with tenants alongside Professor Sharma, Kiara, and Lo in this clinic!”

Jackson’s interest in housing law stemmed from her experience as a founding educator for an elementary school in Compton, where she observed that students experiencing challenges in their housing were adversely impacted while at school.

“When I came to law school, I was looking for a place where I could learn more about housing, because the root causes of educational inequities and opportunity gaps were so important to me,” Jackson says.

Wong notes that the work of the clinic employs an empowerment model that enables tenants to continue to advocate for themselves in the future.

“We try to help build the community by teaching them the law and providing them with tools and resources they can share with other members in their community,” Wong says.

As they prepare to transition into their legal careers, these three graduating students feel poised to carry forward the clinic’s commitment to public service. Jackson plans to return for a semester as a fellow for the clinic and subsequently go into real estate transactional law, while Wong and Quigley will join corporate firms. While they plan to follow different paths following law school, they are dedicated to prioritizing housing justice in the private sector and through pro bono work and are honored to have paved the way for the future of the clinic.

“I was inspired by the idea of an inaugural clinic where I got the chance to be a part of something brand new that promised me the opportunity to grow with it,” Wong says. “Legacy is a big word, but I believe the work we’ve completed will serve as a solid foundation for the clinic to evolve from here on.”



ADDING THEIR VOICE

Two students in the Intellectual Property & Technology Law Clinic (IPTLC) research, write, and file amicus curiae brief in copyright case on behalf of international nonprofit organizations.

By Greg Hardesty

When USC Gould School of Law recessed for winter break in December 2023, two students in the Intellectual Property & Technology Law Clinic (IPTLC) kept working.

Their task: Finalize a 28-page amicus curiae brief, developed over the course of the semester, and file it with the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

The brief was filed in *Hachette Book Group v. Internet Archive* on behalf of Wikimedia Foundation, Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, and Creative Commons. Its focus was protecting the ability of nonprofit organizations to make unlicensed, fair uses of copyrighted works under 17 U.S.C. § 107.

Says Higgins, a second-year law student: “It took a lot of time, but it was a fun and very interesting and great experience.”

Hardy and Higgins are two of eight students in IPTLC for the 2023-2024 academic year. The clinic, which is run by Clinical Associate Professor of Law Jef Pearlman, offers pro bono legal services to clients and provides an opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience.

“I’m proud of the team’s work on the brief and the excellent service they provided to our clients,” Pearlman says of Hardy and Higgins.

CASE ON APPEAL

The case centers on the Internet Archive’s Open Library project, which operates using controlled digital lending to digitize print copies of books — simulating a traditional library online. Because Internet Archive includes fundraising messages on its web pages, a New York district court determined that the program constituted “willful mass copyright infringement,” and was not protected by fair use. The case remains pending before the Second Circuit.

Typically, the clinic works on only one or two such amicus briefs each year, and they are among the most involved projects that the clinic students tackle.

In this case, “The lower court said, ‘Look, you’re a nonprofit and you do fundraising, and because of this, this use is commercial,’” Pearlman explains. “If the appellate court adopts that approach, that would mean all nonprofits are commercial all the time for copyright purposes, and that would be a real problem. That’s the core of the brief.”

Higgins and Hardy engaged in a lot of back-and-forth with clients, meeting directly with the Wikimedia Foundation’s in-house counsel and communicating directly with counsel for all three clients.

“I’ve been extremely grateful to be a part of the Intellectual Property and Technology Law Clinic,” Hardy says. “I came to law school wanting to participate in the clinic, and it has been a great experience working on a broad range of matters for a wide variety of clients.”



Anna Higgins



Zachary Hardy

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The legal research and writing that went into the brief was challenging, say IPTLC students Anna Higgins and Zachary Hardy, but it was also rewarding and has helped prepare them for their future careers as intellectual property attorneys.

“The brief writing process was a great experience and I look forward to applying the skills I’ve developed,” says Hardy, a third-year law student and former president of USC Gould’s Intellectual Property and Technology Law Society.