

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

This January marked the second anniversary of the VLSC serving our nation's veterans. What started out as a handful of students, occupying a temporary workspace in the Chicago Bar Association building, has grown into a dedicated staff of attorneys, clinical students, and law clerks operating out of our permanent suite of offices on the second floor of the law school. To date, we have responded to 1,100 calls for assistance, and actively assisted more than 350 veterans and their families who have come to us for help. In addition, more than 250 attorneys have attended the Veterans Benefits Advocacy Trainings we've provided. More than 75 attorneys in our *pro bono* network have accepted cases and are actively working on behalf of their veteran clients. While we are proud of what we have accomplished in our first two years, we look forward to expanding our reach in the future, and increasing the scope of veterans to whom we might provide assistance.

In November, we continued our tradition of highlighting contemporary issues veterans face by hosting a two-day conference, "Checkpoints & Roadblocks: The Intersection of Veterans & the Law." You can read more about it in this issue. Once again, we were able to gather an exceptional group of speakers and panelists. We would like to thank all of our conference participants for generously donating their time and efforts in making this event a great success. We look forward to building on the many new partnerships developed as a result of their collective efforts.

We are happy to welcome Brian Clauss as an official member of our staff. Brian, who has been part-time co-executive director of the VLSC, has agreed to join the law school full time to continue to help our ever-expanding efforts to assist veterans.

In October, Julie Yriart and I took students Mike Driscoll, Jessica Thornhill, Chris Williams, and Alyson Emery to Washington D.C., to compete in the first Veterans Law Appellate Advocacy Competition, sponsored by the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) and the CAVC Bar Association. We also attended the 20th anniversary celebration for the CAVC, and had meetings with many officials at the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including Major Tammy Duckworth, General Counsel Will Gunn, and Special Assistant Steve Redmon. We also met with our recent graduate, Robin Ficke, who is working at the VA as a Presidential Management Fellow.

Finally, we are proud to announce that two of our students, Connor Bidwill and Amber Wagner, have been accepted into the Army Judge Advocate General Corps. We wish them all the best.



JOSEPH BUTLER

Professor Joseph Butler
 Co-Executive Director, VLSC



BRIAN CLAUSS

Adjunct Professor **Brian Clauss**, co-executive director of the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic (VLSC), was the only Illinois legal educator named an honoree of Transformative Law: Leaders in Legal Education by LexisNexis at the Association of American Law Schools Annual Convention in New Orleans.

The award recognized Clauss and 18 other law faculty for promoting transformative law, raising the bar of legal education excellence, and improving the quality of life for those whom they impact through their influence and activities.

He was nominated by Professor Joseph Butler, his co-executive director at the VLSC. Butler nominated Clauss for his work serving our nation's servicemembers and veterans by being instrumental in the establishment of the VLSC; establishing a *pro bono* network of attorneys who work with the VLSC; and his continued mentorship of students in the ever-expanding program.



VLSC Conference on Veterans and the Courts



Among the panelists for the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic (VLSC) recent conference, "Checkpoints & Roadblocks: The Intersection of Veterans & the Law," on Nov. 6 and 7 were (front row, from left) John H. Nolan of the Office of General Counsel with the US Department of Veterans Affairs; Courtney Wheeler of the US Postal Service; Tom Tarantino of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America; Chief Judge William Greene of the US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims; Guy Gambill, a veterans consultant; Judge Stephen Manley of the Superior Court of California; Judge Robert T. Russell, Jr. of the Erie County Court; Maj. Thomas D. White, Jr., an assistant professor in the Department of Law at the

United States Military Academy at West Point; Judge John P. Kirby of the Circuit Court of Cook County; and Brian Morris, staff attorney for VLSC; and (back row, from left) David Bryant, an attorney in private practice; Capt. Joanne K. Gordon, a JAG officer in the US Military Entrance Processing Command for the US Army; Capt. Michael Barnicle, a JAG officer in the US Army; Assistant Professor Joseph Butler, co-executive director of VLSC; Deborah Tucker of the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence; Margaret R. Thomas of Chapman University School of Law's Military Personnel Law Center & AMVETS Clinic; Steve Berenson, an associate professor and director of the Veterans Legal

Assistance Clinic at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law; Bo Rollins of the Veterans Benefits Department for Paralyzed Veterans of America; Tom Kniffen, of the Regulations Staff of the Compensation and Pension Service for the US Department of Veterans Affairs; Kevin Calia of Morrison & Foerster LLP; Mark Kammerer, director of Treatment Programs and State's Attorney's Office Coordinator for the Cook County Veterans Treatment Courts; Capt. Ryan Coward, a co-founder of VLSC and a JAG Officer for the US Army; Connor Bidwill, a VLSC student; Mary Gordon, VLSC conference coordinator; Steve Novak and R. Kat Abejuela-Morse, students in VLSC; and Julie Yriart, VLSC associate.



Giving keynote addresses on the second day of the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic's (VLSC) Conference on Veterans and the Courts were Dan Grant (fifth from left), director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and L. Tammy Duckworth (sixth from left), Assistant Secretary of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs for the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Welcoming them to the law school were (from left) Capt. Michael Barnicle of the US Army JAG Corps, a co-founder of VLSC and fellow presenter at the conference; Mary Gordon, VLSC conference coordinator; Elizabeth Geisler, a student in the clinic; Assistant Professor Joseph Butler, co-executive director of VLSC; Kevin Cavanaugh of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs; Julie Yriart, VLSC associate; and Adam Fannin and Connor Bidwill, students in the clinic.



John Marshall Dean John E. Corkery (right) and Assistant Professor Joseph Butler, co-executive director of the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic (VLSC) (left) welcome Senator Richard Durbin to the law school as a keynote speaker for the first day of the VLSC's Conference on Veterans and the Courts.

RECENT SUCCESSES

In the Circuit Court of DuPage County, lead counsel Brian Morris, staff attorney for the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic (VLSC) and VLSC students Amber Wagner, Dara Andrews, and Andrew Meyer were able to secure a victory for a deployed servicemember and his family. The family was facing eviction after the rental property in which they lived was foreclosed on and sold at auction. Morris and the students were able to convince the judge not to evict the family from the home and allow them until June 1, 2010, to find a new place to live.

In the Circuit Court of Cook County, lead counsel Julie Yriart, VLSC associate, and VLSC student P. Christopher Williams had a decision vacated by the court on behalf of a servicemember who was the victim of domestic violence. The client filed for divorce *pro se*, and received a default judgment. Her husband then hired a lawyer and got the marriage dissolution vacated on the grounds that the court did not have jurisdiction over the servicemember because she was no longer a resident of Illinois. At the time, she was living on an Air Force base in North Carolina. This meant that the client could not attempt to proceed on getting divorced in Illinois after moving back to the state. Yriart and Williams were able to bring to the court's attention that military service does not change domicile or residence, and thus the previous order denying the client's Illinois residency and Illinois jurisdiction was vacated.

Two Students Take on Leadership Roles in the VLSC



ELIZABETH GEISLER

Second-year student **Elizabeth Geisler** joins the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic (VLSC) as office manager/conference coordinator. In her new role, she oversees the work of the clerical students, assists with academic research that supports the VLSC staff, and organizes the CLE

seminars and annual conference. Geisler formerly was a student clerk with VLSC.



SEAN RYAN

Third-year student **Sean Ryan** is the senior clinical student at VLSC. In his new role, he manages and edits cases assigned to clinical students, conducts intake interviews of veterans seeking assistance with disability benefits, researches and drafts memorandums outlining

the relevant legal issues of each case, and participates in meetings with practicing attorneys to discuss case materials. Ryan is president of the Veterans Law Society.

TWO ORGANIZATIONS HELP VLSC THRIVE WITH GENEROUS DONATIONS

This past semester, the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic (VLSC) benefitted from two generous donations, including a \$50,000 grant from the Dr. Scholl Foundation and \$32,000 from the Consumer Advocacy Center, P.C. as a *cy pres* award.

The Dr. Scholl Foundation is a private, independent grant-making foundation created for charitable purposes, dedicated to providing financial assistance to organizations committed to improving our world. Grants are made annually after an extensive review by the staff and all the directors of the Dr. Scholl Foundation.

The Consumer Advocacy Center, P.C. is a Chicago-based, private, for-profit law firm that concentrates in both individual and class action consumer rights cases. It is responsible for bringing consumer rights lawsuits against companies. When cases are won, the unclaimed portion of the awards goes to benefit a court-approved charity of the firm's choice.

"We are grateful for the Scholl Foundation and Consumer Advocacy Center's support for our veterans programs at John Marshall. Their generous support will allow us to continue and expand upon our mission to deliver *pro bono* legal services to veterans in need—truly the most deserving class of people," said Professor Joseph Butler, co-executive director of the VLSC.





New Veterans Cash Lottery Ticket Unveiled

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn (fifth from left) welcomed representatives of the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic (VLSC) at The John Marshall Law School to a press conference introducing the newest Veterans Cash lottery ticket from the Illinois Lottery. VLSC representatives

included (from left) Elizabeth Geisler and Courtney Slovin, clinical students; Mary Gordon, VLSC office manager/conference coordinator; Julie Yriart, VLSC associate; Assistant Professor Joseph Butler, co-executive director of VLSC; Sven Sommer, a member

of the VLSC's *pro bono* network of attorneys; Sean Ryan, a clinical student; Blake Jackson, a member of the VLSC's *pro bono* network of attorneys; and clinical student Kurt Dittmer.

VLSC Recognized by Media

In recognition of Veterans Day 2009, *ESPN Chicago Radio's* "Beyond Sports" host Hannah Stanley (second from left) welcomed VLSC clinic students (from left) Jessica Thornhill, Arturo Hernandez, and Christopher McElgunn, and staff attorney Julie Yriart to the radio station to discuss the VLSC's most recent activities.

Chicago Sun Times columnist Mark Brown also focused his Veterans Day column on the common pitfalls veterans face in seeking benefits earned, and the process John Marshall students use at the VLSC to assist them.

