

PRO BONO INITIATIVE

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI LAW SCHOOL

Learning Through Service



2014-2015 REPORT

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ABOUT THE PRO BONO INITIATIVE

The University of Mississippi School of Law's Pro Bono Initiative (PBI) is a unique in-house pro bono program. Student volunteers represent clients in daylong mini-clinics, work on policy initiatives, and provide public education on legal issues. Annually, 100-plus student volunteers assist over 500 clients.

Mini-clinics. The program's client-focused opportunities center around daylong "mini-clinics." The mini-clinics convene student and attorney volunteers and clients at the law school and in courthouses or community centers around the state. Each event focuses on a particular area of the law. In 2014-15 PBI offered twenty (20) mini-clinics covering family law, wills and estates, and expungement. The program also added a pro se family law legal clinic and a legal advice and counsel clinic, both in Tupelo.

Policy initiatives. PBI works with advocacy organizations to develop opportunities for students to work on campus, local, and statewide policy initiatives. Students have worked with the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission, the Mississippi Center for Justice, and the Mississippi Bar and addressed issues of disaster relief, juvenile justice, domestic violence, incarceration for fees, and access to justice.

Networking. In addition to assisting clients, volunteer students work in small teams with practicing attorneys from private practice and public interest organizations who provide invaluable mentoring and practical advice on entering the job market.

FROM THE DIRECTOR



From its beginning four years ago, the Pro Bono Initiative has grown to include twenty annual "mini-clinics" and ongoing community education projects and policy initiatives. This is truly a student-driven effort, with much of the vision, design, and execution coming from second and third-year law students. I cannot begin to express my admiration and appreciation for our students, faculty, staff, and alumni who donate precious time to help expand access to justice to those most at risk in Mississippi.

Thank you to all,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debbie H. Bell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Debbie H. Bell
Director, Pro Bono Initiative

2014-2015 ONGOING PROJECTS



DeSoto County Pro Se Family Law Legal Clinic: In 2012, PBI, the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project (MVLV), the DeSoto County Bar and the DeSoto County Chancery Court established a Pro Se Family Law Legal Clinic in DeSoto County. Volunteer students assist pro se litigants at these quarterly events under the supervision of local attorneys in an evening Legal Clinic housed at the DeSoto County Chancery Court in Hernando, Mississippi. In 2014-15, twenty-two (22) pro se litigants received assistance from twenty-six (26) student volunteers in divorce, child custody, child support, emancipation and visitation matters.



Expungement Legal Clinic: For the past two years, PBI has partnered with the Magnolia Bar Association, the Black Law Students Association of the University of Mississippi School of Law and MVLV on a Pro Se Expungement Legal Clinic to assist North Mississippi residents with clearing their criminal records. Fifteen (15) pro se litigants received assistance from twenty-nine (29) volunteers in 2014-15. Over seventy (70) North Mississippi residents received general information about expungements at a public awareness workshop held three weeks before the Legal Clinic.



Family Law Legal Clinic: For the past five years, PBI and MVLP have sponsored a Family Law Legal Clinic at the University of Mississippi School of Law each academic semester to assist North Mississippi residents with divorce, child custody, child support, adoption, name change and emancipation matters. Fifteen (15) residents of North Mississippi received assistance from twenty-five (25) students at these clinics in 2014-15.



LGBT Documents Legal Clinic: PBI and the OUTLAW Chapter at the University of Mississippi School of Law have partnered with the Family Equality Council to host public awareness workshops and mini-clinics to assist LGBT individuals and families with the preparation of estate planning documents including wills, powers of attorney and healthcare directives. Twelve (12) students participated in an LGBT mini-clinic in October 2014. An LGBT public awareness workshop will take place in September 2015. A mini-clinic will follow in October.



Washington County Pro Se Family Law Legal Clinic: For the past five years, PBI, the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project, the Washington County Bar Association and the Washington County Chancery Court have partnered on a quarterly “Pro Se Day” where volunteer students and attorneys spend the day assisting pro se litigants with amending their legal pleadings and otherwise preparing their cases for court. In the 2014-15 academic year, thirty-nine (39) student volunteers assisted fifty-four (54) pro se litigants at these quarterly events.

All Saints’ Episcopal Church’s “Saints’ Brew”: PBI has partnered with All Saints’ Episcopal Church on a volunteer opportunity wherein volunteer students and law professors travel to All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Tupelo monthly to assist with the morning breakfast ministry for the local homeless community.



Pro Se Forms Project: PBI continues to collaborate with the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission and chancery court judges from throughout the state on the creation of model forms for use by pro se litigants in simple, uncontested matters. With the help of PBI, the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission made the first interactive, online form available to the Mississippi Legal Services Programs and the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project in 2014. Student Coordinators from the PBI helped to develop the form for individuals seeking an irreconcilable differences divorce with no children or property.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program: PBI student volunteers continue to assist as greeters and intake workers for this annual program, which is held in a public library on Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons, from late January through April, to assist low-income residents with North Mississippi with tax preparation. Twenty-two (22) PBI students participated in 2015.

Wills Legal Clinic: For the past two years, PBI has partnered on a Wills Legal Clinic with the Military Justice Society Chapter at the University of Mississippi School of Law. In 2015, PBI and the Military Justice Society collaborated with the Young Lawyers Division of The Mississippi Bar and the Lee County Young Lawyers Association on a “Wills for Heroes” event for the Tupelo Police Department. Volunteer students assisted local attorneys with preparing estate planning documents for twelve (12) area police officers.



Pro Bono Charity Ball and Silent Auction: The Law School Student Body Association (LSSB) hosts Pro Bono Charity Ball in Oxford each year to support the operation of the PBI.

2014-15 NEW PROJECTS



Lee County Pro Se Family Law Legal Clinic: PBI, MVLP, the Lee County Bar and Young Lawyers Associations and the Lee County Chancery Court have established a quarterly Pro Se Family Law Legal Clinic. Volunteer students assist pro se litigants under the supervision of Lee County attorneys in an evening Legal Clinic housed at the Lee County Chancery Court in Tupelo, Mississippi. In the 2014-15 academic year, twenty (20) student volunteers assisted thirty (30) pro se litigants in Lee County with a variety of family law matters, including divorce, child custody and support, emancipation and visitation.

All Saints' Episcopal Church's "Lawyers in the Parish Hall" Legal Advice Clinic: PBI has partnered with All Saints' Episcopal Church on a volunteer opportunity wherein volunteer students and law professors travel to All Saint's Episcopal Church in Tupelo periodically to provide legal advice and counsel to Lee County residents. The first event was held in April 2015 and seven (7) students participated.

2015-2016 UPCOMING PROJECTS

Northeast Mississippi Pro Se Family Law Legal Clinics: PBI, MVLP, and Judge Jacqueline Mask will expand the Pro Se Family Law Legal Clinics started in Lee County to three additional Northeast Mississippi Counties – Itawamba, Monroe and Union – in 2015. Volunteer students will assist pro se litigants in those counties with family law matters under the supervisor of local attorneys.

Online Legal Advice and Counsel Project – www.mslegalhelp.org: PBI, MVLP, the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission and Baker Donelson will partner in a creative new venture to assist low-income Mississippians statewide through an online advice center. Only a few states have begun to offer this service, and only one other through a volunteer agency/law school partnership.

OUR PARTNERS

PBI is pleased to partner with the following organizations on its mini-clinic, policy and networking events:

All Saints' Episcopal Church
Black Law Students Association of UM Law
DeSoto County Chancery Court
DeSoto County Bar Association
Family Equality Council
Lafayette County Bar Association
UM Law School Student Body Association
Lee County Bar Association
Lee County Young Lawyers Association
Lee County Chancery Court

Magnolia Bar Association
Military Justice Society of UM Law
Mississippi Access to Justice Commission
Mississippi Center for Justice
Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project
North Mississippi Rural Legal Services
OUTLAW of UM Law
Washington County Bar Association
Washington County Chancery Court
Young Lawyers Division of The MS Bar



SPECIAL THANKS

PBI would like to extend special appreciation to Richard Gershon, Dean of the University of Mississippi School of Law, for his ongoing support of the program. We would also like to thank Eddie Upton, Registrar, for his continued patience with our enrollment process. We would like to recognize Hans Sinha and Will McIntosh for their supervision of the Saints' Brew Project and the new "Lawyers in the Parish Hall" Legal Advice Clinic at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Tupelo. Thank you to Karen Pearis, Faye Peterson, the Magnolia Bar Association and the Black Law Students Association for our partnership on the Expungement Legal Clinic. Thank you to Brett Grantham and Spencer Clower of the Military Justice Society for helping us to plan a successful "Wills for Heroes" event in Tupelo. Thank you to our Chancery Court and County Bar Association partners in DeSoto, Lee and Washington Counties, as well as all of the attorneys who volunteer at our legal clinics. Special appreciation to the Law School Student Body Association for hosting the Pro Bono Charity Ball, an effort that provides majority of the financial support for the PBI. Thank you to our student volunteers, whose generous response continues to make this program a success. Finally, thank you to Tommie Jean Brock, for helping to keep all of us organized, and our 2014-15 Student Coordinators, Tyler Ellis, Deanna Graves, Holly Howard and Cynthia Lee, for their dedication, initiative and good humor in the face of occasional chaos.



STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

The following students participated in PBI events in the 2014-15 academic year. We thank them for their generous service and commitment to helping people in need throughout North Mississippi:

John Archer
Cissy Bacon
Tabitha Bandi
Matthew Barton
Jody Bevill
Brennan Black
George Boone
Autumn Breeden
Fredricka Brown
Shandreka Brown
Monique Caples
Carly Carman
Richard Clifton
Spencer Clower
Misty Cowherd
Meghan Coyne
Brad Daigneault
Tre' Dekle
Joshua Dixon
James Eden
Briley Elliott
Tyler Ellis
Rome Emmons
Garret Estes
Denise Fondren
Lorna Frazier
April Garrett
Davis Gates
Jonathan Gosnell
Brett Grantham
Deanna Graves

Naura Guillaume
Mark Hagood
Stephen Haltom
Kye Handy
Corey Harris
Parker Harroff
Rod Hickman
Olivia Hoff
Heather Horn
Holly Howard
Hoff Olivia
Horn Heather
Harry Howell
Sparkle Jennings
Jesse Kelly
Mable Kimbrough
Caroline King
Jennifer Kirby
Cynthia Lee
Caitlyn Lindsey-Hood
Eddie Littlefield
John McCarty
Jonathan McCormick
Jeremy McDougal
Heather McElwee
Natasha McGill
Anna McGowan
Marshall McKellar
Jade' Meads
Ouida Meruvia
Harley Metcalfe

Rob Mink
Amy Mitchell
Walt Montgomery
Laci Moore
Chase Pritchard
Jake Reed
Adreain Reynolds
Anna Kate Robbins
Emily Robertson
Devin Rose
Bradley Ryan
Joe Sabin
Daniel Schick
Kate Schneller
Christina Seamor
Janet Self
Cecelia Shipp
Lauren Stelly
Patrick Stubbs
Devin Taylor
Joe Terr
Jade' Toney
Nesha Toney
Jenny Urban
Clara Van Horn
Jess Waltman
Brennan Ward
Harrison Webb
Drew Willcutt
Leander Williams, Jr.



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<http://law.olemiss.edu/academics-programs/clinics/pro-bono-initiative/>