

# RISING FOR JUSTICE (HOUSING ADVOCACY AND LITIGATION CLINIC)

## \*\* FORMERLY LAW STUDENTS IN COURT

<b>Faculty</b>	Celina Aldape, Dan Clark, Jessie DeStefano, Paul Di Blasi, Jenifer Foster, David Yellin
<b>What do students do</b>	Student attorneys represent tenants in D.C. Superior Court and other forums, primarily in the Landlord and Tenant and Branch. Student attorneys prevent evictions, preserve affordable housing and secure tenants' rights under federal and District law.
<b>Semester or year-long</b>	One semester, Fall or Spring
<b>Open to</b>	All 2Ls and 3Ls (at least 30 credits).
<b>Prerequisite(s)</b>	All first year courses. There is a strong preference for Evidence and Professional Responsibility. Evidence and Professional Responsibility may also be taken concurrently with the clinic.
<b>Credits</b>	7
<b>Requires Student Bar Certification</b>	Yes
<b>How many students</b>	10-15/semester from Georgetown University Law Center (other students from area law schools also participate)
<b>Conflicts</b>	Students employed by law firms that regularly represent residential landlords are ineligible for this clinic. Please contact the clinic directly for additional information.
<b>Average time commitment</b>	25 hours/week, on average.
<b>Seminar hours</b>	Mondays, 6:00pm-8:00pm
<b>Orientation</b>	Fall 2021 Orientation will be held on <b>August 17-20, 2021</b> ; Please hold <b>January 6-9 and 22-23, 2022</b> for Spring 2022 Orientation
<b>Information session(s)</b>	Tuesday, March 30, 2021 12:00pm - 2:00pm and Wednesday, March 31, 2021 4-6pm via Zoom. Please contact Fatima Beri at <a href="mailto:fb573@georgetown.edu">fb573@georgetown.edu</a> for the link.

**Please note that Rising for Justice is a consortium program open to students at several D.C.-area law schools. RFJ's Main Office is located at 901 4<sup>th</sup> St NW, Ste 6000, Washington, DC 20001. RFJ's Courthouse Office is located at 510 4<sup>th</sup> St NW, Rm 210, Washington, DC 20001.**

## **RISING FOR JUSTICE (HOUSING ADVOCACY AND LITIGATION CLINIC)**

Rising for Justice (RFJ), formerly known as D.C. Law Students in Court, is a joint project of law schools in the District of Columbia. RFJ's Housing Advocacy and Litigation Clinic (HALC) teaches student attorneys to develop lawyering skills in the context of providing legal representation, assistance, and counseling to low-income tenants in the District of Columbia. The program fights displacement, the consequences of poverty, homelessness, and violations of tenants' rights while teaching student attorneys to become effective advocates.

### **CASEWORK**

Student attorneys in HALC represent tenants in D.C. Superior Court, primarily in the Landlord and Tenant and Branch. Student attorneys prevent evictions, preserve affordable housing and secure tenants' rights under federal and District law. Student attorneys in HALC are assigned cases throughout the semester. Under the supervision of our faculty, student attorneys are responsible for all aspects of litigation in cases assigned to them: interviewing clients and witnesses, conducting investigations, preparing pleadings, engaging in settlement negotiations, and conducting all motions hearings and trials pursuant to the Superior Court's student practice rule. Student attorneys will generally have two or more cases assigned to them throughout the semester.

Student attorneys also provide same day counseling and limited representation at RFJ's courthouse office. RFJ's courthouse office is located at: Court Building B (The Courthouse that houses the Landlord and Tenant Branch and the Small Claims Branch), 510 4<sup>th</sup> St NW, Room 210, Washington, DC 20001. Student attorneys are assigned an intake day at the courthouse at orientation. Student attorneys will be required to attend intake at the courthouse every other week during the semester. Student attorneys also go out and meet tenants throughout the District of Columbia at events coordinated with non-profits, tenant organizers, and tenant associations to provide same day counseling. Often student attorneys are assigned cases from the clients they meet at these intakes.

All student attorneys have a primary faculty supervisor. Student attorneys meet with their primary supervisor at least once a week to discuss their case work and reflect on their clinic experiences. Student attorneys are also supervised by faculty supervisors whenever they are providing legal services to clients at the courthouse office or at other intakes.

## CURRICULUM

The clinic begins with a one-week orientation, which takes place before the start of the semester. The orientation frames substantive housing law and the lawyering skills involved in advocating for tenants in order to prepare student attorneys to begin representing tenants. The orientation consists of seminars, exercises, and simulations that help student attorneys develop these lawyering skills. **Fall 2021 Orientation will take place August 17-20, 2021. Please hold January 6-9 and 22-23, 2022 for Spring 2022 Orientation.** Spring Orientation will be four days or less, but we have not finalized the schedule yet.

After orientation, clinic classes and simulations are held Monday evenings. Clinic classes during the semester are held at RFJ's offices, 901 4<sup>th</sup> St NW, Washington, DC 20001. Clinic simulations during the semester are held at the Moultrie Courthouse, 500 Indiana Ave NW, Washington DC 20001. For clinic simulations, student attorneys prepare materials in advance and practice these skills in front of their classmates and supervisors, who critique the student attorneys in real-time.

Student attorneys also participate in case rounds throughout the semester. These meetings are opportunities for student attorneys to share challenging experiences with other student attorneys. At case rounds, student attorneys reflect on challenging experiences in their own and others' cases and brainstorm strategies to address similar challenges in the future.

## TIME COMMITMENT

HALC is a one-semester program. Student attorneys can expect to spend an average of 25 hours per week of work on clinic. Student attorneys are expected to participate in orientation, weekly seminar classes, weekly supervision meetings with their primary supervisor, case rounds, and Courthouse and Community Intakes. Student attorneys are also expected to spend the time required to advocate zealously for their clients. Student attorneys must have one day per week (9:00 am - 5:00 pm) available for court appearances that is not a Monday.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Di Blasi, Director of the Housing Advocacy and Litigation Clinic, at [pdiblasi@risingforjustice.org](mailto:pdiblasi@risingforjustice.org).

## CLINIC FACULTY

### **Celina Aldape**

Celina is a supervising attorney in the civil clinic. Celina joined Rising for Justice in 2017 as a legal fellow, focusing primarily on rent control as a means of preserving affordable housing in the District of Columbia. Following her fellowship, Celina worked as a staff attorney and a senior staff attorney in the Eviction Defense Services program, providing same-day and full representation to tenants in eviction cases and affirmative claims against landlords. She has also worked as a staff attorney in RFJ's Civil Protection Order Project.

Celina graduated from Yale Law School in 2017. She focused on public interest law, representing tenants, defendants in criminal cases, and individuals at risk of losing parole. Celina also holds a B.A. in sociology and neuroscience from Columbia University.

Celina has spent her life moving steadily eastward, from California to Texas to the east coast, and now spends much of her time grumbling about how cold the winters are.

### **Dan Clark**

Dan Clark is the Director of the Eviction Defense Program. Dan earned his LL.M. in clinical teaching and systems change while serving as an instructor in the Housing and Consumer Law Clinic at the David A. Clarke School of Law, University of the District of Columbia. Before joining RFJ, Dan was the Managing Attorney for Housing and Consumer Law at the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program. As Managing Attorney with the Pro Bono Program, Dan oversaw operations of the Landlord Tenant Resource Center and Bankruptcy Clinic while supporting the Advice & Referral Clinic, Advocacy & Justice Clinic, and other programs. He attended law school at American University, Washington College of Law, and was awarded a J.D. in 1995. In 1990, he graduated with a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Florida.

### **Jessica DeStefano**

Jessica DeStefano is a faculty supervisor in the civil clinic. Prior to joining RFJ, she worked as a Staff Attorney in the Housing Rights Project at Legal Services NYC, where she defended low-income tenants in eviction proceedings. She was also a Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society of Rockland County. Jessica is a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center, where she focused on public interest law. During law school, Jessica clerked for the National Center for Lesbian Rights, The Trevor Project, and Whitman-Walker Health. She also holds degrees from American University (B.A.) and Shepherd University (M.A.). Jessica serves on the board of the LGBT Bar Association of DC.

### **Paul Di Blasi**

Paul Di Blasi has been the director of the Housing Advocacy and Litigation Clinic since 2018. He joined Rising for Justice, then DC Law Students in Court, in 2013 as a faculty supervisor. Before then, Paul represented low-income tenants as a Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society of

the District of Columbia. He moved to the District from the Rio Grande Valley in Southmost Texas, where he represented low-income tenants, consumers, and workers as a Staff Attorney at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid.

Paul graduated with honors from the University of Texas in Austin School of Law in 2008. In law school, Paul represented workers, tenants and supported litigation on behalf of Guantanamo detainees and other persons of accused of terrorism in the War on Terror. Paul also organized the University's first "Pro Bono in January" trip to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Paul graduated from Williams College in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and English.

Paul grew up in San Antonio, Texas. He moved to the District in 2012 and now lives in Petworth with his partner.

### **Jen Foster**

Jenifer Foster rejoined RFJ as a faculty supervisor in the civil clinic in January 2018. Jen had worked at RFJ from 2007-2012 as "Attorney of the Day," helping low-income tenants in danger of eviction. She left RFJ to clerk for the Honorable Stephanie Duncan-Peters. Jen has worked at several area legal services agencies, including Our Place DC, University Legal Services, and the Legal Aid Society. She is passionate about working with D.C. residents who are struggling and helping give individuals who are frequently overlooked a voice.

Jen is starting the social work division of RFJ. She loves the interplay of law and social work and thinks that when the two converge, dynamic things can be accomplished. Prior to rejoining RFJ, she worked as Senior Director of the Addiction Continuum at So Others Might Eat. She has a private practice on the side and provides counseling services primarily to veterans and others struggling with trauma and abuse. Previously, Jen has worked at the Veterans Administration Medical Center as a social worker in the emergency room, at a crisis stabilization program for individuals in psychiatric crisis, and as an addiction counselor at a treatment program. She was an Adjunct Professor at Bowie State University for five years, where she taught Social Work and the Law.

Jen graduated from the Catholic University of America's Columbus School of Law and the National Catholic School of Social Services with her J.D. and MSW in 2005. She has her undergraduate degree from Roanoke College, where she majored in sociology, minored in American history, and had a concentration in social work. Right after undergrad, she spent a year in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, where she taught sexual abuse prevention classes.

In her spare time, Jen loves to travel and find adventures. She has bathed tigers, ridden elephants, swam with whale sharks, done a triathlon, hiked to Machu Picchu, swung on a trapeze, and ran a half marathon. Her dream is to travel the world and then become a diving instructor in the Caribbean.

## **David Yellin**

David is a 2011 alumnus of Rising for Justice, having served as a student attorney in the Housing Advocacy and Litigation Clinic. David joined the organization from Ifrah Law, a litigation boutique where his practice focused on a range of federal civil and criminal litigation and arbitration, as well as pro bono work with the Dulles Justice Coalition and other organizations. As an associate at Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP, in New York, David was given the firm's pro bono award for his work with organizations including the New York Office of the Public Defender, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Project Vote, and the Innocence Project. He also has co-taught evidence at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

David received his JD, magna cum laude, from the Georgetown University Law Center, a master's degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and his bachelor's degree, magna cum laude Colgate University. From 2013 to 2015, David clerked for the Honorable Paul W. Grimm in the United States District Court for the District of Maryland.

David is originally from Long Island, New York, but now lives in the District with his wife and sons.