

Brooklyn Law School Launches Elder Rights Clinic

By Deirdre M.W. Lok and Jane Landry-Reyes

This fall marked the launch of the Elder Rights Clinic at Brooklyn Law School. The news is timely as more baby boomers enter the 60+ age bracket. The legal needs of older adults will continue to expand dramatically and by 2030, it is estimated by the Department of City Planning that the borough of Brooklyn alone will have as many as 410,000 residents over the age of 65. Yet today, 53 percent of Brooklyn residents in that same demographic struggle with desperately low incomes.

To address these pressing needs, Brooklyn Law School has collaborated with the Brooklyn Legal Services Elderlaw Project and the Weinberg Center for Elder Abuse Prevention at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale to create the new clinic. It is the latest in the Law School's 30-year history of clinical and externship programs to benefit from close partnerships with community-based organizations, allowing fresh legal minds to polish their craft in the service of some of Brooklyn's most needy residents. Jane Landry-Reyes, Senior Housing Attorney with Brooklyn Legal Services, is responsible for assigning and supervising caseloads while Deirdre Lok, Assistant Director and General Counsel for the Weinberg Center, is teaching the seminar that will provide students with substantive exposure in this swiftly growing field, one driven by the numerous aging-related legal crises facing older adults.

In-depth familiarity and experience with this burgeoning area of law is a wonderful asset for students, especially at a time when students are focused on building skills and making connections that will translate to increased job marketability. The Elder Rights Clinic allows for hands-on work across diverse projects and cases. At Brooklyn Legal Services, students will handle eviction cases specific to senior citizens and take on client representation—from case intake through strategic case assessment, motion practice, court appearances, and possibly even hearings or trial. This direct client interaction with the older adult population will build invaluable client-interviewing skills and an ability to assess client capacity. Students may also have the opportunity to identify and intervene in cases of elder abuse, and to evaluate other basic food, housing, and health care needs. The process of advocating for an older adult at an administrative hearing offers another invaluable experience for learning. The ever-changing



laws and regulations surrounding Medicaid benefits, health care and insurance provides an area ripe for students to position themselves on the cutting edge of a practice that most long-time practicing attorneys are learning as well.

The weekly seminar will complement the case and project work by exploring foundational legal concepts and developing necessary skills. Topics will include advance le-

gal planning, older adult benefits, eviction proceedings, and the guardianship process. In addition, students will work on projects assigned through their seminar that focus on older adults' rights including attorney-client ethics, privacy rights, consent to sexual activity, and access to justice. The Elder Rights Clinic will be excellent exposure for any law student interested in public interest law, health law, criminal law, government, the courts and agencies, or working as court evaluators, guardians, or in private practice with an older adult or family-oriented client-base. The needs of the elderly encompass the full range of legal tools, and this clinic provides an excellent training ground for students as they begin their legal careers.

Deirdre M.W. Lok, Esq. is the Assistant Director and General Counsel for The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Center for Elder Abuse Prevention at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale. Prior to joining The Weinberg Center, she spent several years as an Assistant District Attorney in New York City at the Queens County District Attorney's Office, where she focused on domestic violence cases. Ms. Lok graduated Magna Cum Laude from New York University and received her law degree from Brooklyn Law School. Ms. Lok is an Adjunct Professor at Brooklyn Law School and is co-directing the law school's Elder Rights Clinic.

Jane Landry-Reyes has been a legal services attorney for approximately 20 years. For the past 9 years, she has been a Senior Staff Attorney in the Housing Law Unit at South Brooklyn Legal Services. Her work is primarily in eviction prevention and low income housing subsidy preservation. Ms. Landry-Reyes also worked for approximately 8 years as a Clinical Instructor/Senior Staff Attorney with the Elderlaw Legal Clinic at Brooklyn Law School. She is a 1993 graduate of Brooklyn Law School.