



News Release

July 8, 2013

Contact: Chris Saunders
619-961-4311
csaunders@tjssl.edu

TJSL to Open Free Employee Rights Self-Help Clinic

SAN DIEGO - Thomas Jefferson School of Law is launching a new program to assist people with work-related legal issues. The Employee Rights Self-Help Clinic will provide information about legal rights and options to individuals who are representing themselves.

The first free clinic will be held at TJSL on **Saturday, July 13, from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.** and then on every second Saturday of the month, by appointment only. The location is at 495 11th Avenue, at the law school's Clinical Programs Office, around the corner from the main entrance to TJSL on Island Avenue.

This program will provide a brief, one-time consultation to self-represented individuals with various labor and employment law problems, including issues related to wage and hour law, family or medical leave, discrimination and harassment. The 30-minute consultation per client will be run by TJSL alumni lawyers who practice employment law. Those lawyers will be paired with TJSL law students, who will help the legal services consumers to navigate the office and help them locate self-help materials and other resources.

Professors Susan Bisom-Rapp and Rebecca Lee will serve as faculty co-coordinators of the clinic. "Employees commonly have questions about workplace-related matters, but they may find it difficult to find the answers and may not have the means to consult a lawyer," said Professor Lee. "Thomas Jefferson's new Employee Rights Self-Help Clinic will help provide individuals with the relevant information and resources so that they can more effectively represent themselves should they decide to proceed as pro se claimants."

"Many workers have employment problems that go unaddressed because those employees lack information about their legal rights," added Professor Bisom-Rapp. "Even when such people have information about their legal rights, they may misunderstand the legal issues involved. This problem has a socio-economic dimension; those who lack means often lack access to legal representation. The access problem is also one with racial and ethnic dimensions. TJSL's Employee Rights Self-Help Clinic attempts to address this access to justice gap by providing an initial consultation to self-represented individuals – those who do not have a lawyer."

Two training sessions were held for the more than 30 TJSL students who signed up to participate in the new clinic. Their first training was conducted by Jose Dennis, a mediator with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, who taught them from "A to Z about the EEOC" and how the agency processes employment discrimination claims.

"We are beyond pleased with this show of interest for this exciting new programming," said Professor Bisom-Rapp. "By participating in the program, students will learn about client counseling and relevant

doctrinal law. We hope this will be a way to facilitate the transition from classroom learning to actual law practice.”

TJSL is in the process of establishing a series of free clinics designed to provide assistance and support to individuals navigating their own legal claims.

In addition to the employee rights clinic, there are similar programs currently planned to launch in the fall in the areas of family law, copyright and small claims. TJSL also opened a Veterans Self-Help Clinic this spring.

“These programs will provide much needed guidance to legal services consumers but also offer law students a great opportunity to see law in action,” said Professor Luz Herrera, who has been instrumental in the establishment of all of TJSL’s free clinics. “We look forward to continuing to develop programs that are responsive to the needs of our students and the local community.”

"We are looking forward to the clinic's opening in July and to having additional students involved in the fall when the new academic school year begins," said Professor Lee. "The clinic will offer students an excellent hands-on opportunity to connect employment law and employment discrimination doctrine with practice. In this way, the work of the clinic will serve as a nice complement to our elective course offerings for students who may be interested in a career in the employment law field."

The clinic’s coordinators are grateful for all the support the self-help clinic has received while getting established.

“One wonderful aspect of the clinic is the participation of four TJSL alumni who are practicing employment lawyers,” said Professor Bisom-Rapp. “This enables them to play the role of instructor and mentor to current TJSL students. It’s also a way for them to give back and stay connected to the law school. In turn, for students, such pro bono work for community members represents a way to give back to the San Diego community.”

"We would not be able to do this without the generous help of our alumni volunteers, all of whom practice employment law in the San Diego area," said Professor Lee. "They are a dedicated group, and we are truly grateful for their key participation in this project."

The four TJSL alumni who have been instrumental in the development of this program are Hannah Bingham, Christina Mills, Rory Pendergast and Jennifer Wade.

“From a student's perspective, I would like to say that watching the new program develop from an idea to actuality is gratifying,” said first-year Rachel Vogt. “TJSL alumni, faculty and staff have put a lot of hard work into a program for our local community. Not only will this be a benefit to workers in our local area, but it gives a great opportunity for students to learn about law and programs protecting worker's rights and conditions. This is exactly the kind of experience many of us hope to have when we decide to go to law school.”

Legal services consumers will be seen by appointment at TJSL’s Clinical Programs Office, 495 11th Avenue, starting Saturday July 13, and every second Saturday of the month thereafter, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

To make an appointment, call (619) 961-4371.

#

