



LGBTQ Clinic Students Win Asylum for Venezuelan Man who Fled Anti-Gay Persecution

Caroline Cohen '25, Danielle Schwartz '24, and Sarah Wintner '25 represented "Mauricio," an HIV+ gay man from Venezuela who faced years of violence and harassment on account of his sexual orientation from neighbors, police, and even his own family. Mauricio initially fled to Chile, and he was thrilled to meet and fall in love with "Juan," who had also escaped Venezuela. The couple saved money to travel onto the U.S. where they hoped to live openly and safely together. Eventually, Mauricio set out on a perilous journey of hundreds of miles through life-threatening danger to get to the U.S. In the notorious Darien Gap, he had to climb over dead bodies of migrants who succumbed on the journey as well as evading thieves, dangerous animals, illness and hunger. Months later, he finally made it to the U.S. and onto New York, where he entered a homeless shelter and applied for asylum. A few months later, Juan made the same difficult journey, and the couple were reunited. They married in New York soon after. Clinic students helped both men apply for work permits and gather evidence to support their applications for asylum in the U.S. They prepared affidavits, country conditions documentation, and

a detailed legal brief explaining why Mauricio qualified for asylum. In August 2024, Mauricio was interviewed by an asylum officer at the New York Asylum Office and a few weeks later, his asylum application was granted. Mauricio is now working with clinic students to apply for derivative asylum status for his husband and stepson, whom the couple hope to bring to live with them in the U.S.



Caroline Cohen '25 (l) and Sarah Wintner '25 (r) at the New York Asylum Office for their client's asylum interview.

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Community Development & Movement Infrastructure Clinic Launched

Fall 2024 was the first semester for the Community Development & Movement Infrastructure Clinic (CD-MIC), which uses the tools of corporate and transactional law to support grassroots efforts to make New York—and the country, and the planet—more equitable, sustainable, and just.

CD-MIC's legal work touches on many areas of law: contracts, corporations, employment law, property and real estate, and tax (especially exempt-organization tax law) are routine, but anything from criminal law to land use to securities might arise in any given semester.

Some of the clinic's work in our inaugural semester includes:

- Representing one of the best-known social movement spaces in the city as it navigates a loss of funding and the possible need to shut down operations and terminate staff. Students are providing the group with legal and financial models for different potential transitions to bring in new capital or change its structure.
- Representing a fiscally-sponsored tenants' union that has been forced to change how its finances are managed. Students are counseling the client on its changing compliance requirements and helping it plan toward negotiating a commercial lease for its first office.
- Supporting a coalition of movement groups that are fighting a controversial city development

proposal, using Freedom of Information Law requests to help deepen the coalition's understanding of the funding that has been allocated for the planned development.

- Representing approximately 15 small community-based organizations that are just starting up, incorporating and applying for tax exemption.

As word of our new clinic has spread, we already have some cutting-edge work planned for next semester, including: supporting a Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO) to explore how it could function as a Public Benefit Corporation while simultaneously existing as a decentralized vehicle on the blockchain; representing a non-profit "non-bank" financial platform that is merging with a transitional justice movement group formed out of the uprising in Ferguson; and supporting mutual aid groups in collaboration with an outside public interest law firm starting a mutual aid support project.

Community Development refers to grassroots community efforts to provide services and build community power, especially in low-income communities of color.

Movement Infrastructure. Social movement groups aspire to build ambitious, contentious efforts that scale rapidly. They have many of the same kinds of transactional legal needs as community development groups, but they also want lawyers who understand movement practices and priorities.

Mediation Clinic Students Provide Mediation as Alternative to Litigation or Continued Conflict

Students in the Fall 2024 BLS Mediation Clinic learned about the processes and practices of mediation and provided mediation services to people in conflict. While developing their problem solving, negotiation, and conflict management skills, clinic students assisted community members looking to resolve a wide variety of disputes. This fall, students have been mediating small claims cases online and in person with issues from landlord-tenant, to tattoo removal, to car wrapping.



The Fall 2024 Mediation Clinic at the end of its 2-day intensive mediation training this past August.

Criminal Defense & Advocacy Clinic Continues Decarceration Work

The Criminal Defense & Advocacy Clinic (CDAC) works alongside survivors of domestic violence serving extreme sentences, most of whom are incarcerated at Bedford Hills. Students in CDAC utilize a groundbreaking state law, the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act, to try to reduce survivors' sentences. The clinic's work over the last

four years has resulted in sentence reductions for more than a dozen survivors of severe abuse and long-term incarceration.

The newest cohort of the CDAC headed to Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, New York's maximum-security prison for women to meet with incarcerated clients.



(l-r) Hayley Broich '26, Mya Gelber '25, Emily Rieger '25, and Madison Miraglia '26 on their way back to Brooklyn after a prison visit.



(l-r) Julia Ferguson '26, Shahirah Abdella '26, and Allison Lewis-Towbes '25 outside of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility.

Safe Harbor Clinic Wins Important VAWA Victory!

After nearly three years, the immigration agency finally approved a self-petition filed under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) for client V-V- by students in the Safe Harbor Clinic. A VAWA self-petition allows the abused spouse of a U.S. Citizen or lawful permanent resident to file for their immigration status without having to rely on their abusive spouse to help. This victory puts V-V- on the path to U.S. citizenship and helps close a painful chapter in her life. The client was represented by law students Joseph Koza '21, Yasmine Ech-Chahid '22, and Ezra Lugo-Cortes '22, working under the supervision of Professor Faiza Sayed.

Housing Justice Clinic Students Educate and Empower the Community

This semester in addition to working on tenant defense and source of income discrimination cases, Housing Justice Clinic students have spread the word about estate planning and other ways New Yorkers can protect their homes and families. Students participated in preparing materials for a Estate Planning Clinic organized by the City Council, drafted an Op-Ed on Transfer on Death deeds they plan on submitting for publication, developed a panel on Community Lawyering and Tenant Advocacy, and are planning a Deed Theft workshop in East New York.



New York City Council Legislation and Policy Clinic Students Assist City Council

Spring 2024 New York City Council Legislation and Policy clinic students worked on a wide range of issues at the City Council. The clinic's work included: drafting a bill requiring annual reports on afterschool programs; researching MWBE

engagement in City construction; briefing the Chair of the Committee on Education in preparation for a hearing; and drafting committee reports for multiple committees.



Clinic students and Professor Reid in the Council Chambers at City Hall



Students conduct mock hearing playing the role of both Council Members and witnesses.