SMRLS/U of M Equal Education CLE Kicks off SMRLS’ Centennial Celebration

Nearly 150 legal aid, private and corporate bar and government lawyers and community representatives attended SMRLS’ first of four Centennial Events with local law schools, starting with the University of Minnesota on February 6th at Mondale Hall on the U of M campus.

“Unequal Educational Outcomes: Is Achievement Tracking a Source or Perpetuator of Racial Discrimination Within Schools” was the topic of the day-long CLE, held as part of the U of M’s 24th Annual William McGee National Civil Rights Moot Court Competition. Ten outstanding national and local speakers participated in the event which was organized by Professor Carl Warren of the U of M Law School and SMRLS Senior Counsel, Bruce Beneke. The CLE addressed the difficult and vexing issues regarding the use of ability grouping or tracking in schools and explored the instance of persistent segregation and lack of educational opportunity in Minnesota and strategies to equalize opportunity.

SMRLS has received many positive comments on the outstanding presentations, discussions and materials at this CLE. Many thanks to the CLE speakers who did such an excellent job in preparing and presenting on this critical SMRLS mission and community issue on a pro bono basis. See speaker photos below.
“Barriers to Justice” Centennial Educational Events Draw Nearly 270 persons

To call attention to the emerging critical legal needs of low-income persons and to generate new ideas and resources to address these needs, SMRLS and Hamline University School of Law jointly sponsored a symposium and a CLE on “Justice and the Administrative Process” at the beautiful Klas Center at Hamline University on March 12 and 13, 2009. The CLE featured three administrative law judges and attorneys from SMRLS and other practice settings who discussed “best practices” for administrative tribunal representation. The “Barriers to Justice” symposium featured outstanding national and local speakers, including SMRLS attorneys. Those presenting included Professor Lucy Williams of Northeastern School of Law; Dr. Augustine Romero, Director of Student Equity at Tuscon University School of Law; former SMRLS Board member, the Honorable Tanya Bransford, District Court Judge and Loretta Frederick, a leading international speaker on domestic violence issues (and former SMRLS attorney).

Nearly 270 persons participated in the two events. The conferences highlighted the important ways that staff and pro bono attorneys can help low-income persons receive the emergency assistance they need to survive the threatened loss of a job or home during the recession, or to remove welfare to work or other barriers to achieving economic self-sufficiency. The symposium explored new “justice system” ideas to prevent domestic violence and preserve family safety, as well as laws and new programs designed to assure educational equity for low-income children. SMRLS thanks Hamline Law School and all of the symposium and CLE speakers and planners for their outstanding work in raising community awareness of the unique future challenges faced by low-income persons.

SMRLS CEO Jessie Nicholson; SMRLS Campaign for Legal Aid Chair Steve Kirsch, Esq. and Hamline University School of Law Dean Don Lewis

Front row: Laura Melnick, SMRLS Senior Attorney; Leah Montgomery, SMRLS Staff Attorney; Back row: Ken Gilchrist, SMRLS Senior Attorney; Martha Eaves, SMRLS Supervising Attorney; Lindsay Davis, SMRLS Staff Attorney; Chuck Thomas, SMRLS Litigation Support Counsel (Mankato) and Bruce Beneke, SMRLS Senior Counsel

Hon. Bruce Johnson, Minnesota Office of Administrative Hearings

Hon. Patrick Kontz, Minnesota Department of Human Services
Appealing the Denial of SSDI Benefits
Panel Discussion

Hon. Diane Townsend-Anderson, ODAR Chief Judge
Jonathan Khan, Professor, Hamline University School of Law
Martha Eaves, SMRLS Supervising Attorney

Appealing the Revocation of a Day Care License Panel Discussion

Hon. Bruce Johnson, Minnesota Office of Administrative Hearings; Lindsay Davis, SMRLS Staff Attorney, Jon Geffen, Arneson & Geffen and Cara Hawkinson, Minnesota Attorney General’s Office

Health Care Worker Disqualification Panel Discussion

Leah Montgomery, SMRLS Staff Attorney, Hon. Patrick Kontz, DHS; Chuck Thomas, SMRLS Litigation Support Counsel (Mankato) and Cara Hawkinson, Minnesota Attorney General’s Office
Justice Barriers to Economic Self-Sufficiency, Job Opportunities and the Impact of Welfare Reform Panel Discussion

Future Domestic Violence Issues: Justice Barriers to Securing Physical and Emotional Safety and Family Stability Panel Discussion

Innovative Practices and Opportunities: Justice Barriers to Equal Education Opportunity
Ami Janda and Elizabeth Leahy, both of Hamline Journal of Public Law and Policy

Amy Schwartz and Amber Mulder both of Hamline Journal of Public Law and Policy

Don Lewis, Dean, Hamline University School of Law and Kevin Brown, Professor, Indiana University School of Law

Steve Kirsch Esq., SMRLS Campaign for Legal Aid Chair and Susan Stephan, Alumni Relations - Law, Hamline University

Ana Maria Gomez Gomez, SMRLS Staff Attorney and Degalyann Wade-Sanders, former SMRLS Staff Attorney