

February 18, 2025

Making a Difference in Our Community and Around the World

2024 was a remarkable year at the [Public Interest Law Center \(PILC\)](#). Due to the dedication and passion of our students, we made a meaningful impact, both locally and globally. PILC students directly helped 480 individuals across North Florida, including children, older adults, immigrants, and families with critical legal support.



Professor Darby Kerrigan Scott and Professor Paolo Annino, Co-Directors of the Public Interest Law Center

Beyond our local efforts, our global partnerships have reached new heights. In collaboration with organizations in

Eswatini, Botswana, Zambia and Ghana, PILC students educated 4,000 residents on the Rule of Law and Voting Rights. In Ghana, the [International Human Rights Advocacy Clinic's](#) work was praised by local partners saying, **“Ghana had one of the best elections in our democratic history.”**

The impact of our clinics has been far-reaching. [Professor Rima Nathan](#) ('19), Director of the [Claude Pepper Elder Law Clinic](#), was honored with the [AARP Florida Fraud Fighter Award](#) for her tireless work on behalf of older adults.

Meanwhile, the [Farmworker and Immigration Rights Clinic](#) partnered with [Earthjustice](#) and [the Farmworker Association of Florida](#) to advocate for better working conditions for vulnerable communities. Our students also provided more than 250 immigrants with legal support.

[The Children's Advocacy Clinic](#) has made remarkable strides in advocating for medically fragile children, securing vital home health services for families in need, while also providing legal support to 35 children who are survivors of sex trafficking.

We are incredibly proud of our students' dedication and the positive impact they continue to make.

- Professor Darby Kerrigan Scott and Professor Paolo Annino, Co-Directors of the Public Interest Law Center

"I have learned so much working with Professor Paolo Annino over the past seven years. I am thrilled for the opportunity to co-lead our Public Interest Law Center by his side, and work together to develop the next generation of public interest advocates."

- Professor Darby Kerrigan Scott, Middle Road Foundation Professor who was recently named Co-Director of the Public Interest Law Center



International Human Rights Advocacy Clinic

In 2024, the [International Human Rights Advocacy Clinic](#) partnered with organizations based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa to advocate for the advancement of human rights of vulnerable communities, including LGBTQ+, children, refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons.

Students prepared Know Your Rights (KYR) materials for individuals and advocates in Eswatini, Ghana, Malawi, and Tanzania. Clinic student Alexis Fulton collaborated directly with the Ghanaian [Human Rights Advocacy Centre](#) to develop civic engagement materials aimed at young, first-time voters in preparation for their upcoming election.

Following the election, Human Rights Advocacy Centre Executive Director Modupe Anorkplim Nukunu reported that Ghana “**had one of the best elections in our democratic history yet**” and expressed heartfelt gratitude for the clinic’s support.



Map of Africa with partnered organization regions highlighted.

“This clinic offered me a foundational law school experience, allowing me to contribute to meaningful causes and engage in thought-provoking discussions that significantly advanced my growth as a human rights advocate. The work I undertook in this clinic strengthened my commitment to pursuing public interest law and continues to shape my approach to all of my professional endeavors.”

- 3L Alexis Fulton, Law Student Pro Bono Coordinator for Legal Services of North Florida

See a copy of the flyer Alexis created [here](#).



Farmworker & Immigration Rights Clinic



From left to right, Carlos Dauricio (LLM), 2L Jimmy Burns, 2L Brian Litang, 3L Jesica Balogun, and Prof. Erika Nyborg-Burch, outside Baker Detention Center.

This year, students in the [Farmworker & Immigration Rights Clinic](#) (FIRC) have made remarkable strides in advocating for some of the most vulnerable populations, including survivors of labor trafficking, gender-based violence, and political persecution. Under the expert guidance of [Professor Erika Nyborg-Burch](#), students demonstrated exceptional skill in both written and oral advocacy, representing clients in immigration and family courts.

Notably, students successfully presented five motions and secured a favorable judgment, helping to reunite families. Beyond the courtroom, FIRC played a pivotal role in securing work permits for 10 clients, empowering them to support their families and communities. Additionally, over 70 individuals detained at the Baker County Detention Center benefited from Know Your Rights (KYR) trainings, expanding their access to critical information.

FIRC also forged impactful partnerships with both local and national organizations to meet the needs of essential workers. In collaboration with [Justice in Motion](#), students developed KYR materials for seasonal visa workers, ensuring they understand their rights. On a broader scale, FIRC worked alongside [Earthjustice](#) to advocate for heat stress protections by drafting a letter to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in support of proposed regulations.

When hurricanes Helene and Milton struck, FIRC quickly mobilized in partnership with the [Farmworker Association of Florida](#), spearheading a clothing drive and organizing a fundraiser to assist those affected. Students also had the unique opportunity to meet with Judge David M. Frank and Acting Chief Immigration Judge James K. Grim, who shared valuable insights about their careers and approaches to legal decision-making.

Looking ahead, FIRC is preparing for multiple trials in 2025, continuing its vital work in advocating for justice and protection for vulnerable communities.



“My time in FIRC was the most transformative and educational experience during my time at FSU Law. You work on real cases, with real people, and real stakes. The relationships you make in the process, with clients and other students, will be unlike anything else you do in law school.”

- Melissa Gallo ('24)

The Claude Pepper Elder Law Clinic



Students hand out educational information at FSU Health Expo at the Tallahassee Senior Center on September 11, 2024.

[The Claude Pepper Elder Law Clinic](#) made significant strides in our mission to serve the elder community. With the increasing occurrence of senior financial exploitation, we focused on consumer law with a [lecture](#) from [Ted Mermin](#), Executive Director of the [Berkeley Center for Consumer Law & Economic Justice](#), on October 28. This event was streamed [live](#) and recorded for elder and consumer law attorneys across the state to view and reported on by [WFSU](#).

Additionally, AARP Florida [bestowed the Fraud Fighter Award](#) on Clinic Director Rima Nathan ('19), recognizing the outstanding contributions of the clinic in combatting fraud by defending clients against solar power installation company scams and predatory landlords. Several solar power installation companies are under investigation by Florida's Attorney General for marketing toward and pressuring vulnerable seniors into signing contracts when they are unaware of the details. While this practice is a nationwide issue, Clinic students were able to cancel over \$10,000 in false debts right here in North Florida. Clinic students have also recovered security deposits for seniors facing illegal tactics from landlords.

Overall, our clinic handled numerous impactful cases, hosted several educational workshops in the community and [online](#), and contributed to legal dialogue through several publications in the [Elder Law Advocate](#), the official newsletter of the Elder Law Section of the Florida Bar.

Students wrapped up the semester by participating in the High Ropes Challenge Course at the FSU Lakefront Park where they reflected on conflict resolution, leadership, professionalism, and team building, and had a chance to share some laughs!

Claude Pepper Elder Law Moot Court Competition



Abigail Stein, from George Washington University, argues in the final round of the Claude Pepper Elder Law Moot Court Competition. The volunteer judges, many of whom are FSU alums and local appellate and administrative law judges, look on and ask questions.

Our second annual [Claude Pepper Elder Law Moot Court Competition](#) attracted 20 schools from across the country, with the [AARP Foundation](#) awarding \$20,000 in prize money for the winning teams. The competition problem focused on age and disability discrimination in hiring, as well as the emerging issues that AI will bring to this field. Students competed while also enjoying lectures from special guest litigation attorneys from the AARP Foundation and Senior Counsel for Elder Justice at the United States Department of Justice.

The final rounds were streamed live and can be viewed [here](#).



"It is an honor to host the Claude Pepper Elder Law Moot Court Competition at FSU; the only elder law focused moot court competition in the country. This competition is critical because it not only sharpens students' advocacy skills but also fosters a deeper understanding of the legal challenges faced by older adults, emphasizing the importance of compassion for our aging population. By engaging with these vital issues, students prepare to become advocates who lead with both skill and heart. We are profoundly grateful to collaborate with the AARP Foundation, local practitioners, and judges, whose support makes this impactful event possible and allows us to welcome schools from across the country."

- Professor Rima Nathan ('19), Director of the Claude Pepper Elder Law Clinic

The Children's Advocacy Clinic



FSU Law Students (L-R) 2L Gabriella Hahlbohm and 3L Debbie Aspromonti in the Frost Courtroom.

The Children Advocacy Clinic (CAC) provides holistic, trauma informed direct legal representation to some of the most vulnerable populations; survivors of sex trafficking, children with severe disabilities, and infants.

In 2024 our student advocates participated in eighty hearings and handled seventy-six legal matters. Notably, the clinic filed two appellate cases in the First District Court of Appeal, advocating on behalf of medically fragile children living on respirators and other lifesaving technology--whose Medicaid services were denied at home.

CAC students also made a significant impact in other critical areas of advocacy, including assisting in baby adoptions, helping developmentally delayed children receive Medicaid services, and providing child survivors of sex trafficking with crucial legal services. Under the guidance of Professor Paolo Annino and Professor Emmalyn Dalton ('21), our students not only gained invaluable legal experience but also made a profound difference in the lives of children and families who need it most.

"It has been an honor to advocate for these children. I have learned so much from speaking on behalf of these medically fragile children who cannot speak for themselves. I have grown significantly in my writing and research skills and gained valuable insight into the appellate process, administrative law, and the healthcare system in Florida. However, most importantly, I witnessed firsthand the incredible power of advocacy, learning from my professors and my fellow advocates. I was continually inspired by the parents of these children, whose love for them was a beautiful thing to witness."

- 3L Debbie Aspromonti



Racial Justice Fellowship



Professor Emmalyn Dalton ('21) (middle) and students, 1L Annalisa Smith (left) and 1L Carisse Joseph (right), at the Black Law Student Association's 2024 Fall Induction Ceremony.

This semester, 1L's Carisse Joseph and Annalisa Smith were named FSU Law's Racial Justice Fellows. As

Racial Justice Fellows, they collaborate with peers from other law schools in the Florida Law Schools' Consortium for Racial Justice and participate in both local and statewide educational programs focused on racial justice. The FSU Racial Justice Fellows program is directed by Professor Emmalyn Dalton ('21).

For their local project, Carisse and Annalisa focused on the important issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the legal field, specifically within law schools. Recognizing the low number of minority students in legal education, the fellows researched current trends and challenges in creating an equitable legal education system.

In addition, they partnered with We Raise the Bar, an organization dedicated to inspiring minority youth to explore careers in law. They organized an LSAT workshop aimed at offering practical advice, test strategies, and resources to help students enhance their LSAT scores. Participants also gained valuable insights into the law school admissions process and received firsthand accounts of what law school is really like, making the journey to a legal career feel more attainable.

Alternative Spring Break Program



Students visiting an Apopka farm during Alternative Spring Break 2024.

This year, fourteen students participated in FSU Law's [Alternative Spring Break](#) program, traveling to Apopka, Florida, to hear powerful testimonies from local farmworkers and gain a deeper understanding of their daily challenges and working conditions.

Farmworkers face a multitude of hardships, including pesticide exposure, heat stress, wage theft, language barriers, inadequate resources and the constant fear of deportation. Through these firsthand accounts, students learned how farmworkers are often left in the dark about the risks of the chemicals they encounter, and how some, despite these dangers, courageously speak out against the injustices they face.

One inspiring example shared during the trip was the story of a farmworker who channels their struggles into creativity, making folk-art crafts and quilt designs.

This program provides students with a deeper appreciation for the strength and perseverance of farmworkers, while underscoring the urgent need for greater protection and support for this vital workforce.

“Farmworkers are so important because they pick the produce we eat daily and grow the plants we place on our front porches and in our yards.”

- Melissa Solis Sanchez ('24)



“There are millions of untold and overlooked stories like these from farmworkers across the United States. This experience made us realize we can make meaningful change by ensuring these voices are heard, contacting local representatives to ensure farmworkers are not forgotten, and supporting the advocates who work tirelessly to advance justice for farmworkers.”

-Roger Mata ('24)



(L-R) Joseph Capers, 3L Lauren Evans, 3L Tazara Weilhammer, 2L Jillian Melinek, and 2L Sofia Higgins

The Children's Advocacy Clinic policy students joined with public interest advocates statewide to tackle two critical legal issues: the prevention of human trafficking and the use of solitary confinement for youth.

In their research on human trafficking prevention, the students uncovered a significant policy gap in Florida. While public school students are mandated to receive training on identifying and preventing human trafficking, there is no such requirement for teachers. Alongside other advocacy groups, the students are pushing to close this gap and ensure that educators are equipped with the knowledge and tools to protect their students.

"My time with CAC and Human Trafficking Exploitation Law Project has been the most memorable part of my law school experience. It has been an absolute honor and privilege to help Florida's children."

- 3L Lauren Evans





“Working on the Solitary Confinement Project was something that caught my eye at the end of 1L year, and I knew right away I wanted to be a part of it. While this project has been difficult at times, it has taught me practical skills and lessons that I couldn’t get from any other class. It has been incredible working with Professors Paolo Annino and Emmalyn Dalton, communicating with a workgroup that consists of lawyers, activists, lobbyists, and formerly incarcerated individuals, and fighting for a cause.”

- 2L Jillian Melinek

Learn More About PILC



Share this email:



[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt Out](#) using TrueRemove™
Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.
View this email [online](#).

425 West Jefferson Street | Tallahassee, FL 32306 US

This email was sent to .
To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.

emma®

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.