

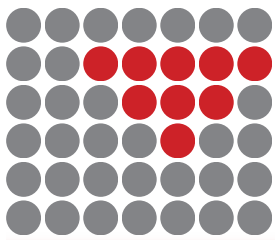
**2025**  
Public  
Interest  
Awards

Chicago-Kent College of Law

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**Public Interest Center**

April 22, 2025



# Welcome from the Director of the Public Interest Center

Welcome to the 2025 Public Interest Awards - I am so glad you are here celebrating with us. This has been a year of growth and adjustment for the Public Interest Center. Some of our regular pro bono opportunities were disrupted by the change in the federal administration but we have persisted and are determined to meet the challenges ahead.



We started the school year in August with Public Service Day. At Public Service Day, 210 students participated in volunteer experiences with 15 non-profit organizations; and we engaged 26 upper division law students as volunteers to assist the first-year law students in finding their way around.

In October, a group of twenty students participated in the annual Chicago Bar Association/Chicago Bar Foundation Pro Bono Fair and the enthusiasm of the students led to a new partnership. Students' interest was so great in volunteering with the Legal Aid Society's Elder Justice Initiative Power of Attorney Clinic that we spun off our first-ever Spring Break pro bono week. Although the week was limited to two opportunities, the hope is to grow this tradition in future years.

We continued to support monthly pro bono activities. Throughout the year, students used their 711 licenses to represent child clients in guardian ad litem cases under the supervision of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services. We continued to partner with Legal Aid Chicago on their monthly Austin Clinic, meeting the community's civil legal needs. Our monthly Immigration Clinics with the Children's Legal Center were paused for several months, to re-group due to the administrative change – but have now continued. In exciting news, the border trip that the Immigration Law Society held for three years, but has not gone on since prior to Covid, is now on again – with a group of students going to the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center in May.

In year three of the Public Interest Center, we expanded our outreach to Alumni and Community Partners through a Public Interest Center newsletter. We held a "Welcome Back" event in February for students to engage with Chicago-Kent alumni. In our efforts to support future public interest lawyers, we are set to launch the Public Interest Career Advisory Network through which alumni and friends can sign up to be a resource to current students. Additionally, we are holding our first Illinois Legal Answers Clinic on June 12<sup>th</sup> during which Chicago-Kent alumni and students will partner to answer civil legal aid questions. We are seeking alumni volunteers.

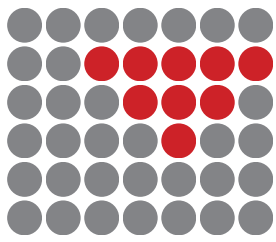
We are proud to be fulfilling our Mission to increase pro bono and community service and support careers in public interest law for Chicago-Kent students, while expanding access to justice in the community. Our goal is to engage every Chicago-Kent student in at least 50 hours of pro bono during law school, helping to foster a mindset of using legal skills to give to others that will hopefully last their entire professional career.

I hope you consider donating and/or volunteering with the Public Interest Center. Our work will continue to get stronger thanks to your engagement.

Thank you again for your support, and I hope to see you again next year.

*Michelle Vodenik*

Michelle Vodenik  
Director, Public Interest Center



# Program

## **Welcome**

Anita Krug, Dean and Professor of Law

## **Public Interest Center Highlights**

Michelle Vodenik, Director, Public Interest Center

## **Certificate in Public Interest Law**

Carolyn Shapiro, Director of Public Interest Certificate Program

## **Law Lab: Self Help Resource Center**

Alexander Rabanal '12, Associate Director, The Law Lab

## **Public Interest Center Certificate of Service**

**Dean's Distinguished Public Service Award**

**Dean's Exemplary Public Service Award**

**Pro Bono Student Leader Award**

Michelle Vodenik, Director, Public Interest Center

## **2025 Alumni Outstanding Pro Bono Service Award**

Anita Krug, Dean and Professor of Law

## **Justice John Paul Stevens Public Interest Fellowship**

Nancy Marder, Director, Justice John Paul Stevens Jury Center

## **Patent Hub Volunteers**

Paul Holly, Director, Patent Hub

## **Constitutional Democracy Project Volunteers**

Dee Runaas, Project Director

## **Kent Justice Foundation Fellowship Recipients**

Michelle Vodenik, Director, Public Interest Center

## **Student Recognition**

Michelle Vodenik, Director, Public Interest Center

## **2025 Vivien C. Gross Pro Bono and Public Interest Leadership Award**

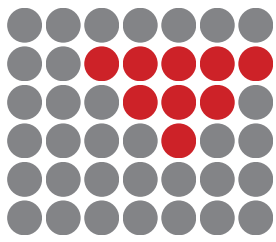
Anita Krug, Dean and Professor of Law

## **2025 Ronald W. Staudt Public Interest Partner Award**

Anita Krug, Dean and Professor of Law

## **Closing Remarks**

Anita Krug, Dean and Professor of Law



# Public Interest Center Highlights

## # Pro Bono Pledge Takers:

2022-23: 121 students

2024-25: 165 students

2022-25 Increase: 36%

## # Student Hours Logged:

2022-23: 4,230 hours

2023-24: 7,720 hours

2024-25: 5,564 hours

2023-24 Increase: 83%

2024-25 Decrease: 28%

## # of Student Volunteers:

2022-23: 131 student volunteers

2023-24: 263 student volunteers

2024-25: 284 student volunteers

2023-24 Increase: 100%

2024-25 Increase: 8%

## Public Interest Center Student Workers

Joseph Strom

Azlynn Brandenburg

Felix Celestino

Rhys Green

Gaby Treviño-Gutierrez



Joseph



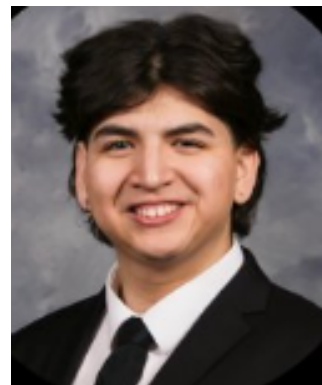
Rhys



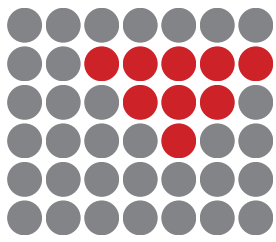
Azlynn



Gaby



Felix



# Student Public Interest Recognition

## Certificate in Public Interest Law, Class of 2025 Recipients

Ben Abrams	Niko Little
Melissa Avila	Annie Poggioli
Colin Boysen	Joseph Strom
Nick Brighty	

## Law Lab

### 2024-2025 Self-Help Resource Center Student Volunteers

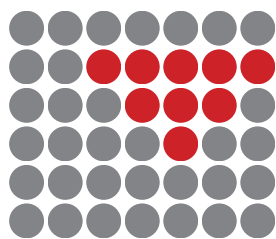
Supervising Manager: Dulcie Xue

Resources Manager: Azlynn Brandenburg

Associate Manager: Glen Batista

Training Manager: Ben Abrams

Ben Abrams	Mariana Guerra	Sydney Olejnik
Haneen Abdelhafez	Olivia Harris	Michael Pannitto
Vincent Abruzzo	Mark Hartge	Elliot Past
Ivana Bailey-Munoz	Mary Hester	Dhruvi Patel
Katie Bassett	Gillian Husack	Isha Patel
Sahil Bathija	Chloe Johnson	Meredith Patterson
Glen Batista	Claire Johnson	Gabbie Pettijohn
Ben Bildsten	Noah Johnson	Annie Poggioli
Musa Bourderdaben	Tiara Kane	Sasha Shapsis
Azlynn Brandenburg	Isabella Kifer	Riley Smith
Kelsea Brown	Bernadette Kornberger	Abigail Steinberg
Rose Brownstone-Questel	Andrea Lawson	Alexandra Silversteyn
Sarita Cavazos	Carleigh Lewaniak	Taylor Thorton
Mati Chikwava	Christine Macke	Ava Treviño
Isabella Courts	Sara Magid	Gaby Treviño-Gutierrez
Brittany Curtis	Muhammad Maroof	Lynna Tu
Dong Eun Song	Melissa McCollum	Iris Vanal
Lydia Fritter	Harley McKabe	Emily Walters
Jackie Garcia	John Merkle	Rufus Coates-Welsh
Kylie Gava	Kara Mullins	Abinaya Wiggins
Terry Geraldson	Josh Nitch	Savannah Yamat
Maxwell Gonzalez	Brittany Ochoa	Mya Yousef
Brennan Gron		



# Student Public Interest Recognition

## Public Interest Center (PIC)

### Certificate of Service

Awarded to students who have volunteered 50 or more hours over the last academic year.

Ben Abrams, 100	Trevor Guidry, 90	Denis Milchev, 406.5*
Alexa Baczak, 59.5	Brett Hart, 185.5	Julnasha Morehead, 54.5
Sahil Bathija, 105.25	Michael Hartge, 59	Gabbie Pettijohn, 50.4
Glen Batista, 51.25	Katelyn Holcomb, 109	Alyssa Quiroga 120.5
Colin Boysen 75.75	Taylor Horton, 85	Breck Radulovic, 50
Alexandra Bogner, 76	Wajeeha, Kamal, 67	Kaitlyn Timm, 93
Chloe Carroll, 165	Sarah Khan, 137	Sylvia Tolczyk, 164
Madeline Cintron, 66	Jessica Klitsch, 171.5	Ava Treviño, 52
Sam Clendenning, 250*	Jacob Krivitzkin, 60	Gaby Treviño-Gutierrez, 250*
Nico Gordillo-LaRiviere, 250*	Molly Levinson, 70	Andres Vasquez, 141.5
Rhys Green, 82	Niko Little, 51	Micah Villanueva, 86
Brennan Gron, 90.5	Colleen McCormack, 401*	

*\*Receiving multiple awards*

## Dean's Distinguished Public Service Award

Awarded to students who have volunteered 250 or more hours over the last academic year.

Sultan Alzahrani, 3L, 254.5 hours	Nico Gordillo-LaRiviere, 2L, 250* hours
Melissa Avila, 3L, 296.5 hours	Colleen McCormack, 2L, 401* hours
Sam Clendenning, 3L, 250* hours	Denis Milchev, 2L, 406.5* hours
Allison Elli, 2L, 368.5 hours	Gaby Treviño-Gutierrez, 2L, 250* hours

*\*Receiving multiple awards*

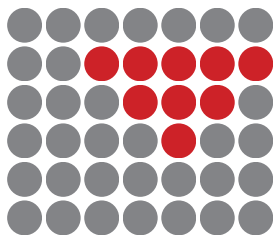
## Dean's Exemplary Public Service Award

Awarded to students who have volunteered 400 or more hours over the last academic year.

Colleen McCormack, 2L, 401* hours	Joseph Strom, 3L, 402.5 hours
Denis Milchev, 2L, 406.5* hours	Dulcie Xue, 3L, 404 hours

*\*Receiving multiple awards*





## 2025 Public Interest Center Pro Bono Student Leader Award



**Christopher Lazare,  
3L, 1,058.5 hours of service**

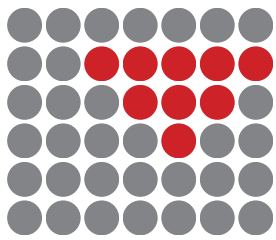
Christopher primarily volunteered with the Cook County Public Defender's Office in the Felony Trial Division at 26<sup>th</sup> Street. He will start his career as a public defender at the Public Defender Service in Washington, D.C. in November. Congratulations, Christopher.

## 2025 Alumni Outstanding Pro Bono Service Award



**Matthew T. Jenkins, Class of '07  
Partner, Passen Powell Jenkins**

Matthew serves on the Board of Directors of the Center for Disability and Elder Law and was a past president of CDEL. He maintains an active pro bono practice, handling numerous cases for clients in need of representation. Matthew currently serves as National Pro Bono Chair for the Legal Committee of his undergrad alma mater, University of Pennsylvania; as Pro Bono Counsel for the Cristo Rey School Network; and on the Pro Bono Committee for the City of Evanston's Lawyer's Group. Congratulations, Matthew.



# Student Public Interest Recognition

## Justice John Paul Stevens Public Interest Fellowship Recipients

The Stevens Public Interest Summer Fellowship at Chicago-Kent seeks to promote the public interest and social justice values that characterized Justice John Paul Stevens' work throughout his long career. The Stevens Fellowship at Chicago-Kent was established in 2011 and is awarded to two outstanding law students who have obtained unpaid summer positions at public interest organizations. Stevens Fellows are selected based on their commitment to public service and their potential for excellence throughout their legal careers. Stevens Fellows at Chicago-Kent are part of a large network of Stevens Fellows throughout the country.

**Emma Renken '27,  
First Defense Legal Aid**



**Nicole Hentges '26,  
Illinois Attorney General's Office**



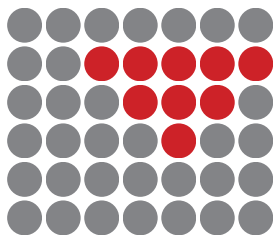
## 2024-2025 Chicago-Kent Patent Hub Student Volunteers

Gabriella Acker  
Sultan Alzahrani  
Grace Beach  
Adit Bhatia  
Maya Chawla  
Isabella Courts  
Keely Criddle  
Walter DeGroft  
Daniela Dulworth  
Mackenna Dunn

Anika Fischer  
Hattie Fitzgerald  
Alex Gianneschi  
Will Hausman  
Katelyn Holcomb  
Margaret Janko  
Chloe Johnson  
Alyssa Kinser  
Daniel Moriarty  
Regan Murphy

Jake Newland  
Victoria Parrott  
Rodriggo Pires  
Cian Rogan  
Adam Steslicki  
Ethan Tibbs  
Peem Udombunyaluck  
Bradley Vaughn  
Olivia Villamagna  
Savannah Yamat





# Student Public Interest Recognition

## Constitutional Democracy Project Volunteers

### **You(th) Decide**

Rose Brownstone-Questel  
Abigail Fraser\*  
James Jezierny\*  
Wajeeha Kamal\*  
Daniel Kassl  
Rebecca Lustig  
Harrison Powell  
Joshlyn Soto  
Grace Wickstrom  
Nina Wilson  
**Youth Summit**  
Myra Chaudry  
Sabira Chaudry

Abigail Fraser  
Jackson Girard  
James Jezierny  
Wajeeha Kamal  
Niko Little\*  
Joseph Strom

### **We the People Judges**

Emma Cline  
Jack Fritschler  
Brennan Gron  
Lauren Justice  
Julian Kasten  
Luigi Laudando  
Donovan McBride

### **Equal Justice Under Law**

Emma Cline  
Kylie Gava  
Brennan Gron  
Corey Hamilton-Buis  
James Jezierny  
Wajeeha Kamal  
Niko Little  
Vanessa Markfort  
Amy Miksch  
Ivylisse Ramirez  
Abinaya Wiggins

\*Volunteered for multiple projects

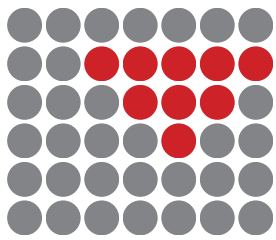
## Public Interest Law Initiative: Leadership



**Ivana Bailey-Munoz, '26**  
PILI Alumni Network  
Leadership Council



**Clayton Kovich, '25**  
PILI Board of Directors,  
Student Intern Representative



# Student Public Interest Recognition

## Post-Grad Fellowships



**Joseph Strom**

Skadden Fellow, Equip for Equality



**Dulcie Xue**

Immigrant Justice Corps Fellow,  
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project

## Kent Justice Foundation Summer Fellowship Recipients

Riley Allan, Kane County Public Defender

Azlynn Brandenburg, Office of the State Appellate Defender

Nico Gordillo-LaRiviere, Illinois Prison Project

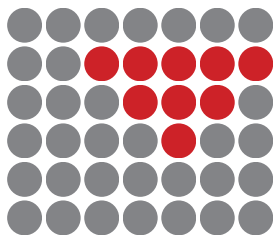
Adelle Mengedoht, Cabrini Green Legal Aid

Abigail Steinberg, Equip for Equality

Cassie Stith, Legal Aid Chicago

Ava Treviño, Center for Disability and Elder Law

Mya Yousef, Judicial Internship



# Public Interest Leadership Award

## 2025 Vivien C. Gross Pro Bono & Public Interest Leadership Award



The Vivien C. Gross Pro Bono & Public Interest Leadership Award recognizes a graduating law student who has made outstanding contributions to public interest law through their pro bono contributions as well as leadership. The award, formerly known as the "Pro Bono & Community Service Leadership Award" has been renamed this year to honor Professor Gross for her significant contributions to public interest law.

## 2025 Recipient of the Vivien C. Gross Pro Bono & Public Interest Award: Joseph Strom

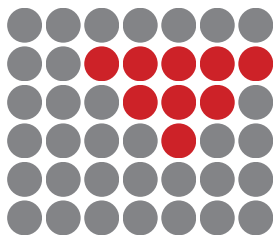


This year's winner of the Vivien C. Gross Pro Bono and Public Interest Leadership Award is Joseph Strom. Joseph is deeply committed to Public Interest Law and Pro Bono as demonstrated by the copious amount of pro bono engagement, public interest internships, and leadership roles he has had throughout law school.

Joseph volunteered with 18 different community organizations in law school - the majority of those hours spent at Legal Aid Chicago, the Children's Legal Center, the Self-Help Resource Center, Administer Justice, the Puerto Rican Bar Association, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Community Christian Church Lincoln Park.

Joseph is a leader at Chicago-Kent, serving as president of the Kent Justice Foundation, our public interest law fundraising group, and on the board of the Hispanic Latinx Law Student Association, Labor and Employment Law Society, National Lawyers Guild, and Christian Legal Society. In addition, Joseph began working in the Public Interest Center during his first semester of law school, when the Public Interest Center was getting started, and has been an integral part of the Center during all 3 years of law school.

Joseph will graduate with the Public Interest Law Certificate and will start his career as a Skadden Fellow at Equip for Equality. A dedicated Public Interest Leader, he has a bright future. Congratulations, Joseph.



# Public Interest Partner Award

## 2025 Ronald W. Staudt Public Interest Partner Award



The Ronald W. Staudt Public Interest Partner Award at Chicago-Kent College of Law recognizes organizations that make outstanding contributions to public interest law and provide opportunities for Chicago-Kent students to gain meaningful experience in public interest practice. In 2017, we changed the name of the award to the Ronald W. Staudt Public Interest Partner Award in honor of Professor Staudt's retirement and his dedication to public interest.

## 2025 Recipient of the Ronald W. Staudt Public Interest Partner Award: Cook County Public Defender



This year's recipient of the Ronald W. Staudt Public Interest Partner Award is the Cook County Public Defender's Office. This award will be accepted by Sharone Mitchell, Cook County Public Defender.

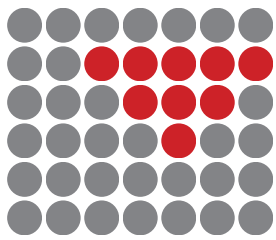
The Cook County Public Defender's Office was nominated and selected because of their important work protecting the fundamental rights, liberties and dignity of each person whose case has been entrusted to them for 90+ years. The critical work they do protecting the rights of the indigent accused, and thereby

ensuring access to justice for those who need it most is beyond compare.

Throughout the years, countless students have spent multiple semesters developing their legal skills under the tutelage of their fine attorneys. We are grateful that their office offers a robust law student internship program through which our students learn how to respectfully and zealously defend clients.

Through the 711 program, their attorneys provide the students with the valuable opportunity to appear in court developing their trial skills. We hear from students regularly who are deeply committed to the work of their office, and incredibly grateful to have found impactful life-changing work through their agency. We also greatly appreciate the new pre-licensed law clerk program through which our graduates have the opportunity to become part of your important work while waiting on bar exam results.

We are pleased to celebrate the Cook County Public Defender's Office. Congratulations.



## Sponsor Recognition

Thank you to the Dr. Edward S. Orzac Foundation and other generous donors for supporting the work of the Public Interest Center. If you would like to donate to the work of the Public Interest Center, please scan the QR code below, click “Give to the Public Interest Center,” and select “Public Interest Center” in the drop-down menu.

