

Sharon Gayl Griffin

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1375 Tyler Drive Woodland, CA
95776 Telephone: 541.908-1302
E-Mail:
sharon@sharongriffinlaw.com

re: HB 5024
University of Oregon Domestic Violence Clinic

Greetings!

I am writing to encourage a vote on HB 5204 that continues funding for the Domestic Violence Clinic at the University of Oregon School of Law and to share the influence of the clinic experience on me both in law school and in my career as an attorney.

I was a non-traditional law student, belatedly starting law school at 40 years old. Frankly, law school itself can be an alienating experience for many students; for me, law school had been an ambition for 25 years, but by the time I was in my second year, I desperately wanted out. My goals in becoming an attorney were, in the most basic sense, to make a positive difference in the community I was a part of and to find personal fulfillment in that work.

When I became eligible to participate in the Domestic Violence Clinic during my second year of law school, it was as if the lights finally came on for me. I had the opportunity to work with incredible people, including my fellow students, our attorney mentors, the associated law school professors and community partners. I had the opportunity to actually learn about serving clients and practicing law, something that is sadly missing from the actual curriculum of law school.

I met with clients, I prepared stalking protective order and Family Abuse Prevention Act cases for Court and I appeared and advocated for my clients under the supervision of the Domestic Violence Clinic staff. The experience for me was terrifying and empowering. I was making a positive difference for my clients and finding personal fulfillment in the work, even though, at times, it was heartwrenching.

I was lucky enough to be able to spend two semesters in the Clinic and work there part time in a clerical capacity while I was studying for the Bar Exam. I was also fortunate to be offered a position as a staff attorney with Legal Aid Services of Oregon in the Albany Regional Office. My position was 50% funded by a grant under the Violence Against Women Act, so 50% of my work had a nexus with domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault. As these cases were also a priority for Legal Aid, they were typically about 80% of my caseload.

After a little over four years with Legal Aid, I went into private practice. By then I had community partners like the Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence and the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare, which continued into my private practice. I had a local reputation for doing this type of work and continued to have

cases referred to me from community partners and local attorneys. I never learned to turn down people who needed help; consequently about 30% of my practice was pro bono throughout the years I was in private practice. I believe I did some good. I believe I had a positive influence on clients, the legal community and the overall community where I practiced. I had a fulfilling legal career which only ended early because of some family tragedies.

I also firmly believe that the Domestic Violence Clinic was an integral part of all of this. I am proud to be a part of the alumni of the Clinic. It needs to be able to continue and grow and to do that it needs this funding. This is where law students are learning advocacy skills, litigation skills and most importantly, from my perspective, learning the importance of being part of a community that focuses on improving the lives of their clients and community and being their voice in the legal system.

Sincerely,

Sharon Griffin