

Detroit Mercy Law launches traveling expungement clinic to assist residents in six Michigan counties



Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack, state and local judges and other dignitaries with Detroit Mercy Law Dean Phyllis L. Crocker, faculty and students at the Project Access kickoff press conference at the Michigan Hall of Justice on July 25.

University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, in partnership with the Michigan Supreme Court and Michigan State Bar Foundation, recently launched Project Access, a traveling expungement clinic serving six, rural Michigan counties from July 26-Aug. 2. Funded by a grant from the Michigan State Bar Foundation, the clinic assists eligible individuals convicted of petty offenses with the often complicated expungement process. An expungement of a criminal record can remove barriers to employment, housing and more.

“Clearing your record can make a difference in getting a job, in restoring a professional license, getting a student loan, getting into college and graduating from college. It makes a difference in securing housing and getting a loan for a home,” said Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack at the July 25 Project Access kickoff press conference at the Michigan Hall of Justice in Lansing.

The clinic is spearheaded by Clinton County Circuit Judge Michelle Rick, a 1991 graduate of Detroit Mercy Law and an adjunct professor who teaches Access to Justice.

“Project Access is a daring innovation designed to restore dignity, pride and in some instances, life necessities to persons among us who have paid their debt to society and who have otherwise atoned for their past wrongdoings,” said Rick. “As a circuit judge, I have seen firsthand the power an expungement can have, and it is awesome.”

Eight Detroit Mercy Law student volunteers are working closely with local judges and volunteer attorneys to serve residents in Gratiot, Wexford, Missaukee, Kalkaska, Crawford counties. Using resources from [Michigan Legal Help](#), the students are screening applicants and then, if they qualify, assisting them with the application process, which includes filing paperwork in court and scheduling hearing dates.

“[Project Access] epitomizes our commitment to serving those in need and to helping students learn and appreciate the importance of making a positive difference in others’ lives,” said Detroit Mercy Law Dean Phyllis L. Crocker. “All of that is part of educating the complete lawyer, and is representative of our law school and university’s core values.”

During the clinic serving Wexford and Missaukee Counties on July 29, students and organizers received a special visit from Michigan Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist, who expressed his enthusiasm for the project and discussed the need to improve expungement laws statewide.

“We need to bring services to people, bring information to people, bring opportunity to people and put it in front of them so they can make good choices,” said Gilchrist in an interview with [9 and 10 News](#). “I hope that they will be able to become advocates for fighting to change these expungement laws to make them more accessible so more people have a chance to clean up their records and have a new chapter.”

For more information:

[Watch video](#) from the Project Access press conference

Check out the following articles:

["Some with Criminal Records Get a Possible Second Chance." \(7/29/2019\). 9 & 10 News.](#)

["Clinics in northern Michigan will help people expunge criminal records." \(7/24/2019\). NPR Michigan Radio.](#)

["Traveling expungement clinics announced." \(7/25/2019\). WLNS Channel 6 News.](#)

Contact Rebecca Simkins Nowak, clinical coordinator at 313-596-9409 or Nick Schroeck, associate professor and director of clinical programs at 313-596-9817

Pictured above (from left to right): Hon. Christopher Murray, Chief Judge, Court of Appeals; Hon. Michael Riordan, Court of Appeals; Nick Schroeck, Detroit Mercy Law associate professor and director of clinical programs; Michael Keane, Michigan Legal Help; Katherine Ganick, student; Courtney Wood, student; Sommer Devergilio, student; Jennifer Bentley, executive director of the Michigan State Bar Foundation; Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack; Detroit Mercy Law Dean Phyllis L. Crocker; Andrew Sitto, student; Bridget Underhill, student; Rebecca Simkins Nowak, Detroit Mercy Law clinical coordinator; Kaycee Berente, student; John Pallas, assistant attorney general, Michigan Attorney General’s Office; Hon. Colin Hunter, 46th Circuit Court; Anjane Naidu, student; Hon. Michelle Rick, Clinton County Circuit Court; Angie Thompson, Gratiot County Circuit Clerk; Rebecca Zarras, student



Lt. Governor Gilchrist speaking to Detroit Mercy Law students, Bridget Underhill and Rebecca Zarras, during the Project Access clinic in Cadillac on July 29.



Project Access organizers, Clinton County Circuit Judge Michelle Rick (right) and Rebecca Simkins Nowak (left), clinical coordinator, with Lt. Governor Gilchrist.