GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF LAW

Women's Employment Rights Clinic
Fall 2021 Newsletter

In Pandemic, Students Return $478,000 to Workers

In the past year, WERC students have put **$478,000** back in the pockets of low-wage workers. Since the clinic's inception, WERC, with a staff of 12 law students per semester and two supervising attorneys/professors, has successfully restored close to **$10 million dollars** to low-wage workers.

This semester, students represented domestic workers, residential care service providers, restaurant workers, janitors, and truckers, who had experienced a wide range of workplace abuses, including wage theft, discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. Despite working over zoom, the clinic's students were very busy!

Take the WERC Alumni Survey

Hard at Work in the Pandemic

When the pandemic hit, our clinic pivoted immediately to focus our attention on the impact of the pandemic on low-wage workers. We not only provided direct legal services to workers who needed help with unemployment insurance and understanding their workplace rights, but we also took on statewide advocacy on two fronts: 1) app-based drivers access to unemployment insurance benefits; and 2) advocating for relief funds for undocumented workers.

With a broad coalition of worker advocates and unions, our clinic spearheaded advocacy before the Employment Development Department, to force them to streamline their process for app-based drivers who are misclassified. We helped hundreds of Uber/Lyft workers navigate the system to secure benefits and drafted an advocacy letter outlining the problems with EDD's handling of app-based drivers' benefits claims. We also spearheaded a statewide advocacy effort to get the state of California to create a disaster relief fund for undocumented workers, who are not eligible for unemployment insurance. Two weeks after our advocacy letter, Governor Newsom announced the $75 million disaster relief funds for this community. While the allocation is not enough to meet the needs, it is an unprecedented step and lays the groundwork for a permanent safety fund for undocumented immigrants.

Donate to WERC!

Governor Signs Senate Bill 321: The Health and Safety for All Workers Act

The Clinic, as legal counsel to the California Domestic Worker's Coalition, drafted SB 321: The Health and Safety for All Workers Act, California wildfires already were endangering the health of domestic workers who were required by their employers to enter evacuation zones, protect animals and/or clean up after the fires. The pandemic increased the health and safety risks for domestic workers. But despite the unprecedented hazards for domestic workers, they remained excluded from health and safety protection. SB 321 establishes the first guidelines for health and safety in the domestic work industry in the state's history and makes recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor on how to expand health and safety coverage for domestic workers. It was signed into law on September 27, 2021. Click here to hear from Domestic Workers on its Importance of Health and Safety Coverage.

Students Take on the Trucking Industry

On August 23, 2021, WERC filed suit in Alameda County Superior Court in the case of *Xiao, et al. v RJJ Trucking Corporation, et al.* In that case, the Defendant trucking companies, operating out of the Port of Oakland, willfully misclassified the five Plaintiff truck drivers, and in so doing, denied our clients the fundamental protections they are due as employees under California law. **Sana Alam** ('23), **Kim Mata** ('23), **Christian Monteclaro** ('23), and **Gwendolyn West** ('23) have been diligently at work on the case: interviewing clients, engaging in strategic planning, and deep-diving into the world of civil discovery in an effort to recover the wages that these workers earned, but were never paid.

WERC partners with the Women's Building

This semester, WERC partnered with the San Francisco Women's Building to provide two free legal clinics. Almost all of the clinic's students participated in conducting intake interviews and providing representation afterwards.

Additionally, **Amanda Cepeda** ('22) and **Kim Mata** ('23) developed and produced a Facebook Live Know Your Rights training in both English and Spanish that will be available to workers on both organization's facebook pages for the foreseeable future.

Alumni Highlight: Chriselle Raguro

Chriselle Raguro (Class of '15) is the Executive Director of the Filipino Community Development Corporation, whose mission is to prevent the displacement of the Filipino community in SF's SOMA and Tenderloin neighborhoods by advocating for affordable housing and access to resources, grassroots community organizing, and capacity-building of low-income residents. She credits her time in WERC with teaching her how to have a collaborative relationship with her clients and the community. At WERC, she learned that the role of a legal advocate is not just to win cases, but to make space for, bolster, protect, and build power for the people.

Her advice for current law students is: People want to see you succeed, so don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Respect your boundaries. Adjust your pace instead of your purpose - you're not in law school to win, you're there to learn.

New Faculty Hire: Kate Raven

Before joining WERC, Professor Raven was a trial attorney with the Alameda County Public Defender's Office for nearly a decade. Prior to that, Professor Raven worked advancing the rights of workers and immigrants in a variety of settings, from organizing with janitors for fair wages in Palo Alto, to providing humanitarian aid to migrants crossing the border in the remote Arizona desert. She earned her J.D. from UCLA School of Law where she specialized in Critical Race Studies and Public Interest Law and Policy, and her B.A. from Stanford University.

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