



THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

PRO BONO BULLETIN

AUGUST 2017



FOCUS ON EMPLOYMENT LAW

Staff Spotlight: Melissa Ader

Fighting against employment discrimination as an Equal Justice Works Fellow

Today in the United States, nearly one third of all adults have arrest or conviction records. Criminal records can make it very difficult for individuals to find a job. According to the National Institute of Justice, in New York City, a criminal record reduces the likelihood of getting a callback or job offer for low-wage work by nearly 50%.

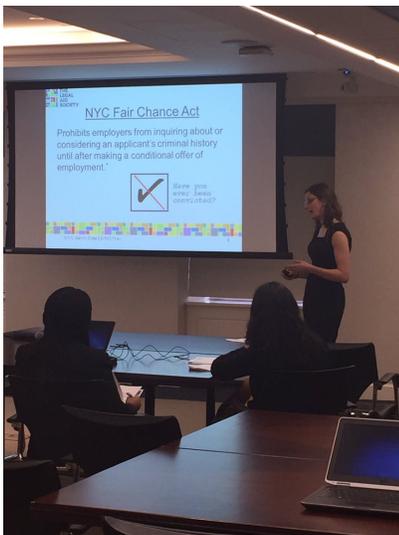
Melissa Ader has been an Equal Justice Works Fellow for The Legal Aid Society since October 2015. The Equal Justice Works Fellowship provides an opportunity for recent law school graduates to pursue careers in public interest law. The fellows design and complete two-year projects to create lasting change in their communities. Sponsored by **AIG** and **Sullivan & Cromwell LLP**, Melissa's project aims to reduce barriers to employment by

enforcing New York's strong antidiscrimination laws and empowering New Yorkers with criminal records to defend their rights and obtain stable employment. When asked why she decided to pursue a career in law, Melissa says she became an attorney to help low-income New Yorkers fight employment discrimination and gain access to good jobs.

On Thursday, July 13, 2017 Melissa led her third "Certificates of Relief Clinic" at Sullivan & Cromwell's downtown office. At the clinics, volunteer attorneys from AIG and Sullivan & Cromwell help clients apply for Certificates of Relief from Disabilities—legal documents that remove automatic bars to employment for people with conviction records and create a legal presumption that the certificate-holder has been rehabilitated. Volunteers help clients complete the application forms and draft a personal statement that describes the past offense, rehabilitation efforts and their good conduct since the time of the offense. Clients leave the clinic with completed applications which they will submit to the relevant court or government agency. Throughout the three clinics, Melissa and the pro bono attorneys have helped prepare applications for twenty-seven clients that The Legal Aid Society would not otherwise have been able to assist.



After graduating from Yale Law School, where she was a member of the Veterans Legal Services Clinic, Melissa worked as a law clerk at the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. At Legal Aid, Melissa represents clients who have been illegally denied work in administrative proceedings and files anti-discrimination complaints and litigation on their behalf. She also provides know-your-rights presentations in communities disproportionately affected by criminal records discrimination, advocates with government agencies to change unfair criminal records policies that hurt large groups of New Yorkers, and advises Legal Aid's criminal attorneys on the employment consequences of particular criminal case dispositions.



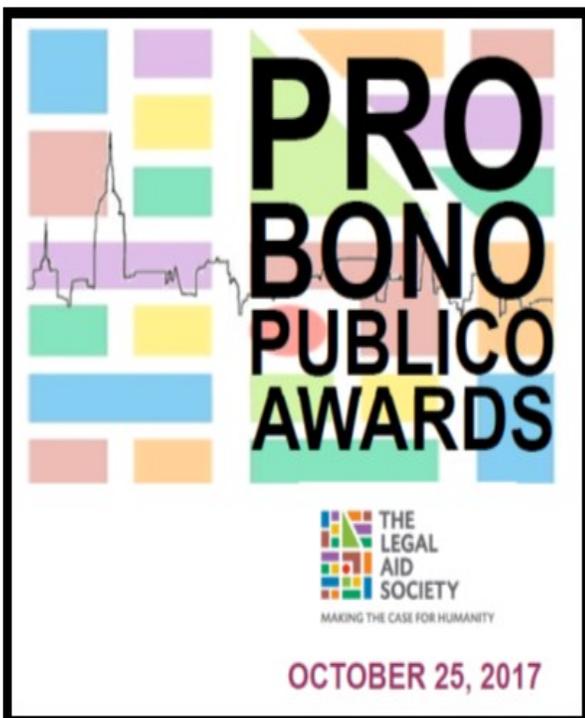
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Staff Spotlight: Continued

Pro Bono attorneys have been an important supplement to Melissa's work at The Legal Aid Society, and recently passed legislation may provide additional opportunities for volunteer attorneys. This October a new law will go into effect in New York State that allows clients sentenced or released from incarceration at least 10 years ago, and who meet other requirements, to seal their convictions from public view. Melissa believes that by filing record sealing motions on their behalf, pro bono attorneys will be able to help clients finally be free of criminal records discrimination. Additionally, Melissa is always looking for attorneys to co-counsel the antidiscrimination litigation that she brings on behalf of her clients.

Under Melissa's leadership, pro bono attorneys provide a second chance to many New Yorkers. "By increasing enforcement of New York's antidiscrimination laws and empowering clients to know and defend their rights," she says, "we can help build a New York in which individuals who have served their time can find good jobs and support their families."

*Save the Date:
October 25, 2017*



Attorney Emeritus: Melinda Roberts

When Melinda Roberts wanted to get back into practicing law after a ten year break, she reached out to The Legal Aid Society. Now, three days a week, she volunteers with The Legal Aid Society's Employment Law Unit, helping to ensure that low income New Yorkers have good representation in labor disputes.

Melinda's favorite part of working at The Legal Aid Society is that several units are able to work together toward a solution when a client is facing a multifaceted legal problem. For example, Melinda is currently representing a live-in superintendent in the Bronx in a wage claim. The client's situation became more complicated when his employer and landlord sued to evict him after the wage claim was filed. Fortunately, there was a team of Legal Aid lawyers in the Bronx ready to step in to handle the landlord/tenant portion of his dispute, while Melinda continued her work to assist the client on the Employment matter.

This is Melinda's first experience practicing labor law, and she feels that Legal Aid provides plenty of support for her to become an effective labor lawyer. She enjoys the structured environment and likes that she can provide help to people who truly need assistance while receiving guidance and backup from experienced labor law lawyers. She says that "every single time I've asked for help from the Legal Aid Attorneys, they have always been there with a guiding hand."

Before she joined The Legal Aid Society, Melinda had a long career at two major law firms, Hughes Hubbard & Reed and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom. She earned her BA from Smith College and then graduated from Fordham Law School.

