

THE FOUNDATION SALUTES THE FRANK M. COFFIN FAMILY LAW FELLOWSHIP



10 years of unique service

Photo by: Martha Mickles

The Coffin Fellows project is named for Hon. Frank M. Coffin, Senior Circuit Judge on the First Circuit Court of Appeals. It is a fitting tribute to his years of public service and specifically, his commitment to legal services for the poor. The Coffin Fellows are selected to serve two-year terms during which time they represent low-income parties in family law cases.

Left Row to Right, Top to Bottom:
Maurice A. Selinger III, Bruce A. Coggeshall,
William S. Harwood, Joseph H. Groff III,
Robert F. Hanson, Hon. Howard H. Dana, Jr.
and Harold C. Pachios, James C. Hunt,
David E. Warren, Karen Frink Wolf,
David S. Bischoff, Lindsay Cadwallader
and D. Jill Green, Gregory A. Tselikis,
William L. Plouffe, Andrew A. Cadot,
Rebecca H. Farnum and Hon. Frank M. Coffin

YEAR TEN REPORT

THE COFFIN ADVISORY COMMITTEE FALL 2008

Ten years ago, the Coffin Fellowship program was created with the financial support of Portland's largest law firms. Since the program launched in September of 1998, twelve recent law graduates (from seven law schools) have served as Coffin Fellows taking cases from the Volunteer Lawyers Project through Pine Tree Legal Assistance.

Update on the Coffin Fellows

Returning Coffin Fellow Courtney Beer is a 2007 graduate of the University of Maine School of Law. Courtney served as the director of marketing for an attorney referral program after college. During law school, she developed strong legal skills working in several different legal settings, including the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, private law firms and the Volunteer Lawyers Project.

New Coffin Fellow Molly Curran Rowles is a 2008 graduate of Cornell Law School and 2001 *cum laude* graduate of Smith College. After college, she worked for three years as a coordinator of the Harvard Committee on Human Rights Studies. During law school, she served as an editor of the *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy*, participated in their Clinic program and spent two summers working for a local legal aid program.

Conclusion

Pine Tree continues to be honored to serve as the host site for this innovative and important fellowship program, which remains a national model of private firm support of *pro bono* service.

Nan Heald, Executive Director



L to R: David Bischoff, Shari Sobel, Katherine McGovern, Molly Curran Rowles, Hon. Frank M. Coffin, Lucia Chomeau Hunt, Lindsay Cadwallader, Elizabeth Hoag, Courtney Beer. Photo by Caroline Wilshusen, Nov. 2008.

David S. Bischoff (1998) currently is in private practice with Berne & Bischoff in Portland, Maine.

Lindsay Cadwallader (1998) is at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, as a Family Law Directing Attorney.

D. Jill Green (1999) is Co-Director of the Attorney Practice Internship Program and Associate Director for Law Career Development at the University of Baltimore School of Law.

Rebecca S. Henry (2000) is the senior Staff Attorney at the ABA Commission on Domestic Violence, responsible for technical assistance programs for lawyers handling domestic violence cases.

Katherine R. McGovern (2001) deals with low-income clients at Pine Tree Legal Assistance.

Colleen M. Sumner (2002) has worked as a hearing officer for the State of Maine and resides in South Portland.

Carrie L. Leighton (2003) is working as counsel for ON Semiconductor Corp., Phoenix, Arizona.

Elizabeth A. Hoag (2004) works at the York County Shelter with the homeless, a collaboration with Pine Tree Legal Assistance.

Shari R. Sobel (2005) is in practice in Kennebunk, Maine, with the firm of Bergen & Parkinson.

Lucia Chomeau Hunt (2006) is a Pine Tree attorney dealing with domestic violence cases.

Courtney I. Beer (2007) is in her second year as a Coffin Fellow.

Molly Curran Rowles (2008) joined the Coffin Fellowship this year.

Cases handled to date

Through September 1, 2008, the Coffin Fellows have worked on 665 cases on behalf of low-income men and women who originally sought help with their family law proceedings from the Volunteer Lawyers Project.

These cases include the Project's highest priorities for representation, including cases where the other side has counsel, there has been domestic violence between the parties, or there are minor children involved in the proceeding. (Since 2000, each Coffin Fellow has also served as a *pro bono* guardian *ad litem* in 1 - 2 family law cases at the request of the Court, a number that is included in the total.) Of the total, 620 cases have been completed to date:

67 cases were completed in 1999
92 cases were completed in 2000
86 cases were completed in 2001
71 cases were completed in 2002
56 cases were completed in 2003
53 cases were completed in 2004
58 cases were completed in 2005
69 cases were completed in 2006
36 cases were completed in 2007
32 cases have been completed
thus far in 2008

A total of 45 cases remain open at the present time.

None of these numbers conveys the real benefit of the Coffin Fellowship program, which is the extent to which it makes positive outcomes possible for low-income individuals threatened with the loss of their homes, their income and – most importantly – their children as a result of a family breakup or other family issues.

*The Coffin Fellows are supported
by long term commitments
from the following Cumberland
County law firms:*

Bernstein Shur*

Cloutier, Conley & Duffett, PA

Curtis Thaxter Stevens Broder
& Micholeau, LLC*

Drummond Woodsum &
MacMahon*

Friedman Gaythwaite Wolf &
Leavitt, LLP*

Jensen Baird Gardner & Henry*

Lambert Coffin

Murray, Plumb & Murray

Norman, Hanson & DeTroy, LLC*

Perkins Thompson*

Pierce Atwood LLP*

Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau &

Pachios, LLP*

Thompson & Bowie, LLP*

Verrill Dana, LLP*

*denotes a founding law firm



CLIENT STORIES

QZ *a Chinese citizen, moved to the United States with her daughter after marrying RM. A year later, RM, filed for divorce. QZ, who does not speak English, was in the process of becoming a US citizen when this happened. Working with ILAP, the Coffin Fellow was able to protect QZ's citizenship status through language in the divorce judgment and the timing of the final divorce judgment. QZ is now divorced and in the process of becoming a United States citizen.*

MS *is the mother of twin boys born 14 weeks premature in Massachusetts. The twins weighed less than two pounds, had multiple medical issues, and were placed in the neonatal intensive care unit for four months. During this time MS disclosed to the social worker that she was concerned about taking the boys home after their discharge. After referral to a domestic violence project MS got a protective order in Massachusetts and fled to her family's home in Maine. Pine Tree assisted MS in getting a protective order in Maine, and the boys were transferred to the hospital here. Both MS and the boys' father filed parental rights actions in their respective states. The Coffin Fellow took the case on an emergency basis urging the Maine court to hear the case here, because it would be impossible for MS to travel to litigate the case in Massachusetts given the boys' fragile health and need for constant care. Judges from the Maine and Massachusetts courts communicated and agreed that Maine should accept jurisdiction of the case. At the initial appearance, the Coffin Fellow successfully advocated that the court had jurisdiction to enter a child support order under an exception in the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act. Because MS has income from child support, she has economic stability and the twins are back with her after being discharged from the hospital. They now receive in-home therapies and are making rapid progress, which doctors say is due to MS's excellent care. The boys' father travels to Maine for regular visits, until they are able to travel for more extended visits to his home.*

ML *obtained three protection from abuse orders against RL during their seven year relationship, and ultimately filed for divorce. Throughout their relationship, RL had refused to allow ML to work for anyone else, leaving her financially dependent on him. After their separation, ML gave up possession of the marital home because he threatened to blow it up if she lived there. ML was homeless for a period of time, unemployed, had no money, no belongings, and no job history or references. Meanwhile, RL refused to pay the mortgage and foreclosure proceedings were started. The Coffin Fellow filed a Motion for an Expedited Hearing in an attempt to save the marital home. After an interim hearing, the Coffin Fellow advocated to protect marital asset. The court ordered RL to pay the mortgage or sell the home. Failing a mediated resolution, the case proceeded to final hearing. RL was ordered to pay ML transitional spousal support for one year, purchase her a vehicle, and assume all marital debt. ML now lives in her own apartment and is holding two jobs. RL has not complied with the Court Order and the Coffin Fellow has filed a Motion for Contempt in an effort to enforce the Court Judgment.*

JK *the mother of three young girls is a survivor of violence at the hands of her ex-husband. The violence culminated in a police chase and her husband's arrest after he attempted to run her off the road with the children in the car when the Coffin Fellow took the case. Because her name was not on the line of equity credit that her husband took out without her knowledge, the bank refused to allow her access to any information about the loan, but she continued to make payments on the loan and the mortgage to avoid foreclosure. After consultation with the new MASH (Maine Attorneys Saving Homes) foreclosure project at Pine Tree, the Coffin Fellow successfully negotiated with the credit union a reduction of the monthly payments on the home equity line of credit. The Coffin Fellow was successful in obtaining a final order with child support based on income imputed to the defendant and a spousal support award that allowed JK to become certified as a nurse's assistant.*

