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Breaking the School-to-Prison Pipeline: the East Bay Community Law Center Enlists Fellow Cory Isaacson in Its Efforts

The Berkeley Law Foundation & EBCLC Select Joint Fellow to Implement School Justice Project Proposal

During her keynote address at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights' 26th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Awards Luncheon, the Honorable Barbara Lee (D-California 13th District) called for a concerted effort to “crack the school-to-prison pipeline.”

Heeding the Congresswoman's call, and expanding on ongoing efforts, the East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC) and the Berkeley Law Foundation (BLF) have selected Cory Isaacson as their joint fellow to mark the 25th Anniversary since BLF helped fund EBCLC's launch. Isaacson's School Justice Project (SJP) aims to provide holistic representation for young people in disciplinary and juvenile cases arising in or around schools. SJP builds on EBCLC's newest program, the Youth Defender Clinic, which aims to end the school-to-prison pipeline for low-income youth of color in Alameda County.

“Cory will be an outstanding advocate for at-risk youth in expulsion proceedings. SJP dovetails with and expands on EBCLC's existing work, and Cory will make the project a success. She is addressing a great need in the community, and we are confident she will be an excellent mentor and clinical supervisor,” says BLF Board President Holly Baldwin.

EBCLC Executive Director Tirien Steinbach elaborates, “For EBCLC, the ability to keep working with our most brilliant, diligent and passionate law students as they transition into their new roles as our professional colleagues is what this fellowship is all about. We are so fortunate to welcome Cory as a two-year BLF-EBCLC fellow, and the young client community is fortunate to have such a zealous advocate on their side.”

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Isaacson comes to EBCLC with an impressive résumé. Not only is she an EBCLC alumna, familiar with its mission and work, but she also has experience working for the Contra Costa County Public Defender's Office, the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta, Georgia and, more recently, the Death Penalty Clinic at UC Berkeley Law (Boalt Hall).

Prof. Ty Alper, Associate Director of the Death Penalty Clinic says of Isaacson, "Cory impressed me with her persistence, patience, and wonderfully collegial demeanor. Her feedback on the work of others is at a level of quality I would expect from an experienced attorney, and her tone is generous and constructive."

Isaacson will start her fellowship in August 2013. Beaming, she exclaims, "I'm so excited to take part in the great work being done by the Youth Defender Clinic, and I'm really grateful to BLF and EBCLC for the privilege to start my career doing important work at an amazing and effective organization."

BLF will fund the first year of Isaacson's two-year fellowship. BLF traditionally awards one to two grants per year to individuals undertaking public interest law projects that serve legally disadvantaged or politically under-represented groups and promote systemic change. However, this year BLF is directing the fellowship towards a project hosted by EBCLC, to celebrate BLF's significant contributions to launching EBCLC 25 years ago. The 2013-2015 BLF-EBCLC Joint Fellowship is being awarded to a graduating member of the UC Berkeley Law Class of 2013, to undertake a project hosted by EBCLC.

Baldwin concludes, "It is thrilling for BLF and EBCLC to unite once again and celebrate our shared roots."

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The East Bay Community Law Center provides free legal services to eligible East Bay clients. Since its founding in 1988 by law students at UC Berkeley's Boalt Hall School of Law, EBCLC has become the largest provider of free legal services in the East Bay. To learn more about EBCLC, go to www.ebclc.org. The Berkeley Law Foundation funds public interest law through summer grants for current Boalt students and year-long grants for law graduates and new attorneys from around the country. BLF's grants enable the recipients to work on innovative and critical projects that provide desperately needed legal services to communities all around the nation. To learn more about BLF, go to www.berkeleylawfoundation.org.