

FAMILY VIOLENCE CLINIC

Program Description

Jeffrey R. Baker, Director of Clinical Programs

Thomas Goode Jones School of Law launched the Family Violence Clinic in the spring of 2004 with a modest two-year grant from the Department of Justice. The Clinic is the result of a partnership between the law school and Legal Services of Alabama. The Clinic receives clients by referral from the Family Sunshine Center domestic abuse shelter, the Clerk of the Domestic Relations Court, the Montgomery County Police Department and the Montgomery County Domestic Violence Task Force.

The Clinic functions as a legal-aid law firm providing *pro bono* services to victims of domestic violence. The students meet clients for interviews, conferences and court preparation at the Family Sunshine Center in Montgomery's inner-city. Under Alabama's Protection from Abuse Act, petitioners for protection orders are afforded hearings on emergency orders within 14 days. This scheme affords the students a unique opportunity to manage a case from initial interview through case evaluation, investigation motion practice and final hearing within the course of a semester. The Family Violence Clinic provides professional training for practice in family law, litigation and trial advocacy and affords exposure to state courts, the criminal justice system, police practices and domestic abuse resources.

All Family Violence Clinic students interview clients, research and investigate cases, and students with limited-practice authority from the Alabama State Bar counsel and advise, prepare pleadings and represent clients in court proceedings. For reasons of safety and professionalism, all students work in pairs and meet clients at the Family Sunshine Center.

By the end of the 2006-07 academic year, 74 students had participated in the Family Violence Clinic. To date, more than 150 clients have received *pro bono* legal advice, appropriate referrals or legal representation by student participants.

In 2005, Thomas Goode Jones School of Law was the recipient of the Family Sunshine Center's President's Special Service Award, in recognition of the law school's outstanding service and support through the Family Violence Clinic.