40 UNDER 40

2014

Supplement to Chicago Daily Law Bulletin and Chicago Lawyer
Law Professor Colleen Boraca is an attorney making a positive difference in the lives of others. Boraca, 36, is a clinical assistant professor at Northern Illinois University College of Law and supervises the new Health Advocacy Clinic in Aurora, Illinois. The clinic is a medical-legal partnership and features a team of lawyers, medical professionals and social workers trained to simultaneously address the legal, medical and social needs of the area’s homeless and low-income population.

The clinic is housed in Hesed House in Aurora, the second largest homeless shelter in Illinois. Prior to that, she was a supervising attorney at the AIDS Legal Council of Chicago and an adjunct clinical professor at Loyola University Chicago School of Law, where she taught Introduction to Health Justice, Interdisciplinary Health Advocacy, and the Health Justice Project.

Boraca, a graduate of the Loyola University Chicago School of Law, is highly respected by her peers for the work she is doing to help others.

Professor Emily A. Benfer, with the Loyola University Chicago School of Law, called Boraca a gifted attorney and a natural leader. Benfer first met Boraca in 2011, when Boraca wanted to become involved with the Health Justice Project, a medical-legal partnership between Erie Family Health Center and Loyola.

“Professor Boraca was eager to connect AIDS Legal Council of Chicago to the project and serve the patients of Erie,” Benfer said. “Upon our first meeting, I was greatly impressed with Colleen’s passion, experience and depth of legal knowledge.” Benfer called Boraca a trailblazer in interdisciplinary legal education and the medical-legal partnership model.

“She has achieved important results on behalf of elderly individuals suffering from Alzheimer’s Disease and dementia, people with mental illness in crisis and individuals affected by HIV/AIDS,” Benfer said. “She chose to start a new legal clinic in Aurora due to the rising number of low-income individuals living there who need legal representation. Without a doubt, Professor Boraca and her students will achieve exceptional results for clients, and her students will gain skills they will apply throughout their legal careers.”

Boraca also worked for the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office. From 2003 to 2009, Boraca was one of four civil prosecutors who handled approximately 4,000 mental health involuntary admission and psychotropic medication cases annually in Cook County. As an adjunct clinical professor at Loyola, she supervised law students in challenging disability cases. She directed the Family Support Project at the AIDS Legal Council which helped families affected by HIV/AIDS access quality health care, achieve financial stability, and make thoughtful future plans for their children.

Benfer said Boraca brought many organizations together to help change laws that seriously affected people living with HIV/AIDS. The work she spearheaded resulted in the repeal of the Illinois HIV Principal Notification law.

“The repeal paved the way for increased HIV testing and treatment among adolescents,” Benfer said. “Professor Boraca approaches her work with a sense of profound empathy, commitment and the highest legal and ethical standards. When combined with her creativity and resourcefulness, these attributes enable her to achieve important and lasting results for our community.”

Boraca has served as the chair and vice-chair of the Chicago Bar Association Mental Health and Disability Law Committee and has been a member of both the Chicago Bar Association Legal Aid Committee and Chicago Bar Foundation Pro Bono Committee. She joined the Kane County Bar Association, volunteers at Mission of Our Lady of the Angels in Chicago, and volunteers at Mary Queen of Heaven Parish Sunday School. Boraca is a frequent speaker on health law issues.

Reprinted with the permission of the Law Bulletin Publishing Company
Kenya Jenkins-Wright is highly respected by her peers not only for sharp legal skills, but also for her selfless dedication to personally make an impact on those in need.

Jenkins-Wright is a senior associate at Greene and Letts where she focuses her practice on tort defense, commercial litigation and employment law.

Ngozi C. Okorafor, with the Illinois Department of Central Management Services, said Jenkins-Wright has distinguished herself as a tenacious, but respectful, litigator. “Whether she is counseling and defending clients through litigation, drafting substantive motions or briefs, arguing motions or depositions, or simply appearing before judges or tribunals, Kenya is always the consummate professional, well-prepared, and a zealous advocate for her clients,” Okorafor said.

Jenkins-Wright has served as an adjunct professor with Rockford Business College and has participated in a number of litigation and diversity related seminars. Prior to working at Greene and Letts, Jenkins-Wright was an associate at Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP’s Rockford office, where she primarily focused on medical malpractice.

“As a senior associate for a reputable minority-owned law firm, Kenya embraces the notion of diversity in all aspects of the law,” Okorafor said. “Whether it be ensuring that diverse attorneys work upon client matters or that diversity persons are represented in the judiciary, Kenya has worked tirelessly toward achieving diversity in the legal profession.”

Jenkins-Wright is also well liked among judges. An associate judge in the Circuit Court of Cook County formerly worked for Greene and Letts, and worked with Jenkins-Wright for several years stated: “Ms. Wright is a unique and exceptional litigator. She has handled litigation matters that range from medical malpractice to police misconduct,” the judge said. “She has a keen ability to digest complicated facts, extract critical ones and quickly evaluate their impact on a case. This skill has allowed her to resolve complicated matters by settlement or getting a favorable result at trial.”

Conrad Nowak, of Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, met Jenkins-Wright through various bar associations, commended her work in the community. Jenkins-Wright is a member of the First United Methodist Church Chicago Temple’s Homeless Ministry. For the past five years, she has volunteered on weekends at the breakfast ministry giving clothing to the homeless. “It is one thing to merely participate in the good work of organizations through financial contributions; it is quite yet another to give one’s own time and touch the lives of people directly,” Nowak said. “Kenya does this with a passionate dedication and I believe it makes her not only a better lawyer, but a more valued member of the community and the bar in general.” Jenkins-Wright served as Alumni Council President at Northern Illinois University College of Law.

Jenkins-Wright is a member of the Illinois State Bar Association, where she currently serves on the Board of Governors. She is also a member of the American Bar Association, the Black Women Lawyers’ Association of Greater Chicago, Inc. and the Cook County Bar Association (CCBA) – the oldest African American bar association in the United States. Jenkins-Wright is a member of the Chicago Bar Foundation’s Young Professionals Board, where she is a life fellows member and President-Elect. She will assume the presidency of the Young Professionals Board in the approaching year. She also has been active as the Chicago Bar Association Young Lawyers Section, where she served as a Diversity Director. Jenkins-Wright has received numerous awards and accolades for her work in bar associations including: a 2014 American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division Star of the Year; a number of Cook County Bar Association President’s Awards; and a Cook County Bar Association Junior Counselor Award.

Jenkins-Wright has also been involved with Chicago Youth Centers, where she served as a mentor to a high school student and worked with the centers to participate in the CCBALaw Day program.
Heather Wier Vaught is considered one of the most influential lawyers in the state. Vaught, 39, serves as chief counsel to Illinois House Speaker Michael J. Madigan. She also is the Parliamentarian for the Illinois House of Representatives and Ethics Officer for the House Democratic Caucus.

In her role as chief counsel, Vaught represents members in their official capacities and provides in-depth analysis of every legislative measure before the House of Representatives. As House Parliamentarian, she acts as the final arbiter on the interpretation of House Rules, issuing decisions on questions of parliamentary procedure and constitutional requirements. As the Ethics Officer to House Democratic Caucus, Vaught authors legal opinions and advises legislators on compliance with state ethics laws.

During her time with the Office of the Speaker, Vaught has served as the point person for many of the top legislative initiatives moving through the General Assembly, including concealed carry, pension reform, predatory lending and mortgage foreclosure prevention, as well as ethics and election reform.

In 2009, Vaught served as Assistant House Prosecutor for the Impeachment Trial of Governor Rod Blagojevich. Michael J. Kasper, of Fletcher, O’Brien, Kasper & Nottage, P.C., worked with Vaught on the Articles of Impeachment had this to say about her lawyering abilities, “While many lawyers prepare and litigate many trials, few must create a trial system from whole-cloth.” Kasper continued, “Ms. Vaught deserves much of the credit for the fact that Governor Blagojevich’s impeachment, trial and conviction were conducted with organization, and professionalism, and that the results were given widespread credibility by the media and public.”

She has also been appointed by the Attorney General as a Special Assistant Attorney General on several cases raising important constitutional questions.

Before attending law school, Vaught served as the communications manager for the president of the American Bar Association. Vaught graduated from the Northern Illinois University College of Law in 2005, where she was highly active.

Attorney Richard Prendergast has worked closely with Vaught over the past three years. Their work together has included collaboration on the Illinois redistricting litigation upholding the constitutionality of the redistricting process and legislative map adopted by the General Assembly following the 2010 census. They have also worked together on representation of members of the General Assembly on constitutional grounds in connection with efforts to subpoena their testimony and representation of the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate in the recent constitutional challenge to the Governor’s efforts to withhold appropriations for the payment of legislative salaries. “In my 45 years of practice, I have seldom encountered an attorney of any age with Heather’s capabilities and willingness to master challenging legislative constitutional issues,” Prendergast said.

State Representatives Kelly Burke, Emily McAsey, Elaine Nekritz and Ann Williams issued a joint statement about their thoughts on Vaught. “To describe Ms. Vaught’s position as demanding is an understatement. Each legislative session, 8,000 bills are introduced ranging from complex taxation, social welfare to regulations,” the state representatives wrote. “Ms. Vaught reviews every bill introduced in the House or sent from the Senate and she must be able to cover a wide range of practice areas and conquer them.” The state representatives added, “Heather Wier Vaught is one of the most influential lawyers in the state, regardless of age.”

Vaught awards include: Northern Illinois University College of Law Young Alum of the Year, the Edward Deitrich Award for Commitment to Civil Law, the Illinois State Bar Association’s Public Interest Law Student Award, the National Association of Women Lawyers’ Student Award, the NIU Outstanding Women Student Award, and the ABA Silver Key Award.

“ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL”

Reprinted with the permission of the Law Bulletin Publishing Company©
Dean Jennifer Rosato Perea and the NIU College of Law Congratulate our Alumni and Faculty

**Kenya A. Jenkins-Wright**
*Class of 2003*
*Associate*
*Greene and Letts, Chicago*

**Heather Wier Vaught**
*Class of 2005*
*Chief Counsel to the Office of the Speaker, Illinois House of Representatives*

**Colleen M. Boraca**
*Clinical Assistant Professor*
*NIU College of Law*

on being named “40 Under 40” Attorneys for 2014