

UNM Law School Receives Planning Grant to Increase Pool of Public Interest Attorneys Serving New Mexico's Most Vulnerable Children and Families

The University of New Mexico School of Law has received a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to plan an initiative focused on children's law and racial equity, which will aim to improve the well-being of New Mexico's most vulnerable children by expanding and diversifying the pool of public interest attorneys highly trained to serve this population.

"Too many children in New Mexico, especially children of color, grow up in conditions of poverty that adversely affect healthy development," says David J. Herring, Dean of the Law School. New Mexico ranks 50th out of 50 states on child well-being, when considering economics, education, health, family, and community, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2013 Kids Count survey. A 2013 report by Feeding America names New Mexico as the most food-insecure state in the nation for youth.

The \$96,578 one-year planning grant aims to create a plan to increase the number of skilled, highly effective lawyers who will help alleviate the effects of poverty on children and families. Currently, the public interest law sector is too small and under-funded to meet the state's demand for legal services. According to Herring, "The law school will seek input from stakeholders from throughout the state, such as legal services providers, minority communities, and tribes, to develop a plan to create a pipeline of excellent lawyers who reflect New Mexico's diverse communities and who will serve low-income children and families."

"Holistic, interdisciplinary, legal, and policy advocacy can mitigate the devastating impacts of poverty and racial inequity," says Beth Gillia, principal investigator for the grant and director of the [Corinne Wolfe Children's Law Center](#) of the Institute of Public Law. "By addressing the conditions that lead to and exacerbate poverty, public interest lawyers can improve the wellbeing of children over their life span and across generations."

Gillia and Law School Professor [Barbara Bergman](#), the Pamela Minzner Chair in Professionalism, and Assistant Professor [Yael Zakai Cannon](#) are working together on the planning grant. The plan they develop will be two-pronged: First, it will seek to expand the pool of diverse and outstanding public interest attorneys advocating on behalf of low-income children and families through funding for scholarships, fellowships, and other training and career opportunities. Second, the plan will aim to ensure that law students receive the high quality legal and interdisciplinary training needed to serve New Mexico children and families effectively. To do this, the law school and stakeholders will identify areas of unmet legal and policy needs of vulnerable children and their families in the state, the capacity of existing organizations to meet those needs, methods the law school can use to enhance that capacity, and the core competencies of public interest lawyers.

The stakeholders will include faculty, staff, and students within the Law School, Law School alumni, other UNM departments that serve children and families such as the School of Medicine, the New Mexico Judiciary and a number of its commissions, tribes, public service legal providers, and other policy and advocacy organizations.

At the end of the planning period, the team will develop a multi-phase proposal to implement the plan that enjoys community and stakeholder support.

About the Kellogg Foundation

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal pioneer, Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life.

The Kellogg Foundation is based in Battle Creek, Mich., and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes. Special emphasis is paid to priority places where there are high concentrations of poverty and where children face significant barriers to success. WKKF priority places in the U.S. are in Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico and New Orleans; and internationally, are in Mexico and Haiti. For more information, visit www.wkkf.org.

For more information about upcoming stakeholder meetings, [click here](#)

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