

CALIFORNIA WESTERN INNOCENCE & JUSTICE CLINIC®

The California Western Innocence and Justice Clinic (IJC), formerly known as the California Innocence Project, was founded in 1999 to train law students to become zealous advocates and to provide students the opportunity to assist in freeing the wrongly convicted from prison. Since its inception, CWSL faculty, students, and volunteer attorneys have helped free 40 innocent people from prison.


This summer, California Western offered its first-ever summer session innocence clinic. The IJC clinic enrolled 11 students to study and work with Professor Megan Baca and Professor Arianna Price of California Innocence Advocates (Cal-IA). Cal-IA also provided volunteer opportunities for students during the spring academic term.

During that term, Cal-IA attorneys, with the help of CWSL student interns, were able to secure the resentencing and release for their client Wesner Charles, Jr., who had served 22 years of a life sentence for a crime he did not commit. On behalf of another client, the L.A. Superior Court issued an Order to Show Cause in Cal-IA's petition for writ of habeas corpus, meaning that after 30 years in prison a full exoneration for that client is likely on the horizon. Cal-IA also represented a 62-year-old client at her parole hearing and successfully secured her release after 12 years in prison.

On July 1, Professor Amy Kimpel officially joined CWSL as associate professor and executive director of the IJC. She was previously associate professor of Clinical Legal Instruction and director of the Criminal Defense Clinic at the University of Alabama. There, in addition to managing a robust trial practice, Professor Kimpel's clinic worked on postconviction cases resulting in the release of four clients from state and federal prison.

Earlier in her career, Professor Kimpel worked at the Judicial Council of California in its Criminal Justice Services Office and as a public defender for both the Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc. and the Santa Clara County Office of the Public Defender in San Jose. As a public defender, Professor Kimpel tried 25 cases in federal and state court and argued before the Ninth Circuit several times. She earned her JD, magna cum laude, from New York University School of Law where she was a Hays fellow and Vanderbilt Medal recipient. She also holds a BA in English, magna cum laude, from Columbia University and a MA in education from Teachers College, where she was part of the first cohort of Columbia Urban Educator fellows.

"At its core, CWSL is about educating future lawyers," Dean Scott concluded. "We look forward to offering a reenergized clinic with capacity to train more students while at the same time building on its rich history of innocence work."

A portrait of Professor Amy Kimpel, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a black top. She is standing in front of a white wall with a sign that reads "Innocence & Justice Clinic".

Innocence &
Justice Clinic

Professor Amy Kimpel on Her Passion for Innocence Advocacy

I tried my first case as a student in the Juvenile Defender Clinic at NYU Law over 15 years ago. Our client was a Bronx middle-school student charged with assault after getting into a fight with another girl after school. In trial, I cross-examined a prosecution witness and directed a defense witness. My supervising attorney crossed the complaining witness who admitted that she pushed our client first. The judge, Juan Merchan, found our client not guilty. Victory was sweet.

I learned so much working on that case. My experiences as a clinic student were central to making me the lawyer I am today—teaching me to be prepared, client-centered, and creative.

The clinic cemented my interest in public defense and led me to San Diego, where I began my legal career at the Federal Defenders office. My clinical experience was also pivotal because one of my clinic classmates is now my wife and we have two beautiful children together.

For the past five years, I've directed the Criminal Defense Clinic at the University of Alabama School of Law. I get calls and emails from clinic graduates telling me they just won a trial, rocked an appellate argument, or negotiated a deal that spares their client from facing the death penalty. Being a clinical professor, where I get to help clients, train the next generation of lawyers, and

work for systemic change, is my dream job.

I am thrilled to be returning to San Diego and taking the helm of the California Western Innocence and Justice Clinic. After 25 years, this clinic has a storied history. It has secured the release of dozens of clients and touched the lives of hundreds of law students. I am excited to be a part of this legacy and to lead the Clinic in its next chapter. I'm thankful that Megan Baca and Arianna Price, experienced habeas attorneys, will continue to work with the Clinic and aid in this transition. There is still so much work to be done.