

News & Insights

Dykema Establishes First Of Its Kind Free Legal Clinic For Ferndale Public Schools In Michigan

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Detroit

Dykema, a leading national law firm, has established a monthly pro bono legal clinic for the students and families of Ferndale High School and Ferndale Middle School in Ferndale, Michigan. Dykema's Free Legal Clinic is the first of its kind to take place in Michigan, and the only one ever to be sponsored by a law firm.

The clinic was developed to address the legal needs of students and their families that disrupt a student's learning environment and impair their academic success. The legal clinic is held the first Thursday of every month at Ferndale High School, with the next event taking place on February 4.

"Children who face the threat of eviction as well as those who are exposed to domestic violence at home have a hard time focusing at school and need legal assistance to ensure their safety and opportunity for achievement," said Heidi Naasko, Dykema's Pro Bono and Diversity Counsel. "Dykema's clinic plays a role in minimizing these obstacles for students and their families by assisting them with their legal problems in order to bolster their overall success."

At monthly clinics, Dykema lawyers conduct 30 minute free and confidential consultations with clients to identify their legal problem and potential remedies. The clinic focuses on cases that relate to family law, domestic violence, immigration, landlord/tenant issues, guardianship, Veterans' benefits, criminal expungement, consumer protection, estate planning and home contractor problems. Criminal matters or disputes involving the school are not accepted. Potential clients should call the clinic directly at (248) 203-0050 for an appointment.

"The launch of Dykema's Free Legal Clinic is an important undertaking by our firm with tangible results, and is an indicator of our determination to be a leader in pro bono efforts," said Charles LeMoine, Chairman of the firm's Pro Bono committee. "The clinic provides a great opportunity for outreach to vulnerable students and families within Michigan, and if it proves successful, will be expanded into other states served by Dykema lawyers."

According to the Legal Service Corporation, for every one person served by legal aid, four people remain unrepresented. Those who try to obtain legal assistance through existing agencies are forced to deal with intolerable wait times. Dykema's Free Legal Clinic provides realistic access to legal services to a smaller group of people where Dykema lawyers have the opportunity to make a real and immediate impact.

Dykema's Free Legal Clinic operates in partnership with several nonprofit organizations including the Family Law Assistance Project, Lakeshore Legal Aid, The Michigan Poverty Law Project, Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Legal Aid and Defender Association.

Dykema's Longstanding Commitment to Pro Bono

Dykema believes the practice of law, especially in a large corporate firm, is a privilege that carries with it profound societal responsibilities. Performing legal services for those who cannot afford to pay for them "or for organizations that benefit such persons" is a central part of the firm's effort to improve the quality of life for the underserved in its community.

In 2008, Dykema attorneys and support staff performed 11,252 hours of pro bono work. The firm and its attorneys have earned several prestigious awards for its pro-bono work, including the 2009 Exceptional Service Award from the ABA Death Penalty Representation Project, the 2009 John W. *Cumminsky* Pro Bono Award and the 2009 Detroit Metropolitan Bar Pro Bono Service Award.