



The Rape Survivors' Law Project **A *Pro Bono* Initiative of the Victim Rights Law Center**

What is the Victim Rights Law Center?

The Victim Rights Law Center (VRLC) is the first nonprofit law center in the nation - and still one of only a few - solely dedicated to serving the legal needs of sexual assault victims. While police and prosecutors may be able to arrest and try an assailant, such interventions cannot address many needs of the victim that fall outside of the criminal process. The fear and emotional turmoil that follows an assault can destabilize very basic - yet essential - needs such as housing, employment, physical safety, and the path toward an education. Access to a civil attorney is often the only recourse to prevent this powerful ripple in a victim's life. Without the Victim Rights Law Center, many victims would have nowhere to go to get this critical support. The VRLC staff, with the assistance of *pro bono* attorneys and paraprofessionals, provides free civil legal assistance to over 500 rape survivors annually in Massachusetts.

Prior to its establishment as an independent law center in October 2003, VRLC operated as a division of the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, which has served the needs of Massachusetts rape victims for over 30 years. VRLC has established itself as a pioneer organization in the field of civil representation of sexual assault victims. In fact, over the past three years, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Violence Against Women (OVW) has recognized our *pro bono* attorney training manual and our other legal work as a model worthy of nationwide replication.

What is the Rape Survivors' Law Project?

The Rape Survivors' Law Project (RSLP) is the *pro bono* initiative of the VRLC. To date, the RSLP has engaged over 270 attorney and paraprofessional volunteers. The RSLP was originally launched in the Fall of 2000 in partnership with the Women's Bar Foundation of Massachusetts and the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts. The VRLC has since assumed the primary role in all direct client work and in training and supervising the RSLP's *pro bono* attorneys.

Through the RSLP, *pro bono* attorneys and paraprofessionals assist sexual assault victims with a variety of civil legal needs including privacy rights, restraining orders, housing, university judicial proceedings, immigration, and negotiations with employers and school administrators. In addition to representing victims with these legal needs, our volunteers assist VRLC staff with research projects, as well as drafting amicus briefs and legislation regarding the rights of sexual assault survivors.

How to Become Involved in the Rape Survivors' Law Project

Participation in the RSLP is open to attorneys and paraprofessionals in Massachusetts. For more information about the RSLP and how to become a volunteer, please contact Lindy Aldrich, VRLC Staff Attorney, at (617) 399-6720 ext.10.