



INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

By Professor Arthur D. Wolf, Director

SUMMARY OF EVENTS FOR FALL 2015



The Legislative Institute hosted three major events during the fall 2015 semester. We first celebrated Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, which Congress established as a national holiday several years ago. This year, we focused on the citizenship aspect of the holiday by hosting a naturalization ceremony in which foreign nationals became citizens of the United States. The new citizens included immigrants from Armenia, Bhutan, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, India, Iraq, Jamaica, Latvia, Nepal, The Netherlands, South Korea, and Ukraine.

➤ **Dean Eric Gouvin** opened the ceremony with welcoming remarks. He observed that the "great strength of our country is its ability to attract new citizens from all around the world, who come for their own personal reasons, but who contribute their talents, culture, and values to enrich our country as a whole."

Federal Magistrate Judge **Katherine (Katy) Robertson '90** presided at the formal proceeding in our Pellegrini Moot Court Room. We also invited several other graduates to participate in the program. Attorney **Kathryn (Katie) Foster '09** sang *America the Beautiful* and *The Star Spangled Banner*, a role she reprised from her graduation in 2009.

Attorney **Phyllis Ryan '81**, the principal speaker, offered congratulatory remarks, words of encouragement, and a challenge to be a fine citizen. Having been born in Italy, she told the poignant story of her father bringing the family to America to begin new lives. Emphasizing the joy and opportunities that flowed from coming here, Attorney Ryan stressed to the new citizens the importance of taking advantage of those opportunities and of being a devoted citizen to their families, to their communities, and to their country.

➤ **The Institute also hosted a hearing of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary of the Massachusetts Legislature**, which conducts most of its hearings through committees composed of members of both houses. Senator William N. Brownsberger, senate chair, and Representative John V. Fernandes, the house chair, presided at the hearing.

The Joint Committee heard testimony on a variety of bills relating to criminal justice, human rights, and other topics, including a bill sponsored by Representative John Velis (Democrat, Westfield) that seeks to prevent persons from misrepresenting their receiving military honors and exploiting that misrepresentation. After the United States Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the Federal Stolen Valor Act, Rep. Velis introduced his bill so that state law could fill the gap left by the Court's decision in a constitutionally permissible manner.

For two hours, the Joint Committee heard testimony on three bills relating to human rights: S. 877, which addresses civil remedies for certain human rights violations, and two companion bills, S. 1116 and H. R. 1530, providing civil and criminal remedies for female genital mutilation (FGM). Passage of these bills is essential for the advancement of human rights in the Commonwealth.

Four years ago, the United States Supreme Court decided *Kiobel v. Royal Dutch Petroleum Co.*, 133 S.Ct. 1659 (2012), which left critical gaps in the enforcement of human rights in the United States. The Massachusetts Legislature has been a leader in advancing human rights, the subject of these bills.

* Read more about the Institute at www.law.wne.edu/ilga.



Photos (L to R) The Institute hosted a naturalization ceremony in which foreign nationals became citizens of the United States; State Representative Angelo Puppulo Jr. '01 speaks at the hearing of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary of the Massachusetts Legislature; and Jennifer Weekley and Jessica Scouten, students in Professor Lauren Carasik's Human Rights Clinic.

➤ **Last Spring Professor Wolf offered a course in International Human Rights** in which he asked his students to address a simulated civil action involving FGM, the focus of S. 1116 and H. R. 1530. In addition, our Human Rights Clinic under the supervision of Professor Lauren Carasik has worked on legislation to expand the reach of certain human rights norms in part by extending the statute of limitations for several such claims, including torture, crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes. That bill, S. 877, was on the Committee docket.

Jennifer Weekley and Jessica Scouten, who were students in Professor Carasik's Human Rights Clinic, testified at the hearing in support of S. 877. Their testimony was highly persuasive, scholarly, and compelling, filled with factual and legal support for expanding the reach of human rights through the passage of S. 877. Professor Wolf also testified on the three human rights bills.

➤ **Finally**, the Institute hosted the 20th Anniversary of our annual Supreme Court Review Conference. Professor Emeritus Leora Harpaz (pictured right), who founded the review conference, participated in this year's review as she has for 20 years. On Page 9 of its Winter 2015 edition, this magazine published a summary of the conference. ♦



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