



UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
School of LawTM

DEAN'S REPORT | 2023-24





Dear Friends,

As I reflect on 2024, I am filled with immense gratitude for all we have accomplished at Richmond Law — thanks to the unwavering support of YOU — our generous donors.

We continue to uphold the legacy of the Honorable Robert R. Merhige Jr., L'42, one of our most courageous alumni, renowned for his landmark decision to desegregate Virginia's schools. After months of renovation, we proudly began the academic year in the stunning new moot courtroom that bears his name. This was made even more meaningful by an anonymous donor's six-figure lead gift, aimed at establishing a professorship in his name — further cementing Judge Merhige's profound impact on the legal community and legacy at Richmond Law.

Another significant milestone this year was achieved through the generosity of 107 donors, who helped us exceed the challenge set forth by lead donor Mary Lou Kramer, L'75. Mary Lou graciously committed \$50,000 in matching funds to establish the Law Women's Centennial Scholarship. With contributions surpassing \$120,000, we were delighted to award the first scholarship this fall to an exceptional 1L student, Lily Goodman.

Your gifts have also empowered us to launch two innovative programs designed to further equip our students with the tools they will need to excel as advocates for their clients. The Belonging in Practice series offers crucial guidance on navigating cultural competency and identity within the legal profession and the Access to Justice Clinic provides students with hands-on experience while encouraging them to wrestle with critical questions of equity and justice.

As you explore this year's Dean's Report, I hope you will see how your generosity continues to shape Richmond Law — from attracting outstanding students and leading scholars to providing cutting-edge programs and world-class facilities. YOU make this all possible.

Thank you for your continued partnership and generosity, which ensure Richmond Law remains a remarkable place to learn, grow, and lead.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy C. Perdue". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Wendy C. Perdue
Dean and Professor of Law

LEGACY & IMPACT

Since Richmond Law's founding in 1870, alumni and friends have given generously to make an extraordinary legal education possible for our students.



Inspirational Gift

Anonymous donor makes six-figure commitment in honor of Robert R. Merhige Jr., urges others to join in!

Courageous. Mentor. Far-Sighted. Spider. These are just some of the words used to describe the Honorable Robert R. Merhige Jr., L'42. Perhaps best known for his January 1972 desegregation decision requiring the merger of Richmond City Schools with the surrounding Henrico and Chesterfield county districts, Judge Merhige has a deep legacy at Richmond Law. In addition to teaching trial practice at the law school for many years, the newly renovated moot courtroom bears his name, as does the Merhige Center for Environmental Studies. Building on this legacy, this past year, an anonymous donor made a six-figure lead gift with the goal of raising enough money to name a faculty position in honor of Judge Merhige.

Photo above: Judge Merhige with students circa 1960, courtesy of the University of Richmond Magazine archives. Photo right: Judge Merhige photo by Doug Beurlein, circa 1998, courtesy of University of Richmond Magazine.

“At a time of deep political divisiveness and a continued push for equal opportunity, Judge Merhige’s rulings from more than 50 years ago remain relevant today,” said Dean Wendy Perdue.

In addition to 40 desegregation cases, during his 31 years on the federal bench, he also ordered the admission of women to the University of Virginia in 1970 (50 years after Richmond Law admitted its first female students!); presided over cases of Klansmen and Nazis accused of killing political opponents; fined Allied Chemical for polluting the James River with an insecticide; and tossed out the appeals of G. Gordon Liddy and other Watergate defendants.

Of his bold decisions that were not always popular, Judge Merhige reflected to the *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, “I thought people would say, ‘We don’t like the little S.O.B., but he’s followin’ the law...That didn’t happen.’” Despite this opposition, he pushed forward and held steadfast to the rule of law.

“At a time of deep political divisiveness and a continued push for equal opportunity, Judge Merhige’s rulings from more than 50 years ago remain relevant today.”

— Dean Wendy Perdue

“Judge Merhige is a pivotal figure in Virginia’s march toward greater equality,” Perdue said. “He helped to train countless Richmond Law students. We should have a faculty position named in his honor, and I am delighted that this gift lays the foundation to accomplish that.”

The donor has expressed the hope that others who knew Judge Merhige, benefited from his mentorship, or simply admire his deep commitment to justice will join in contributing to this effort.

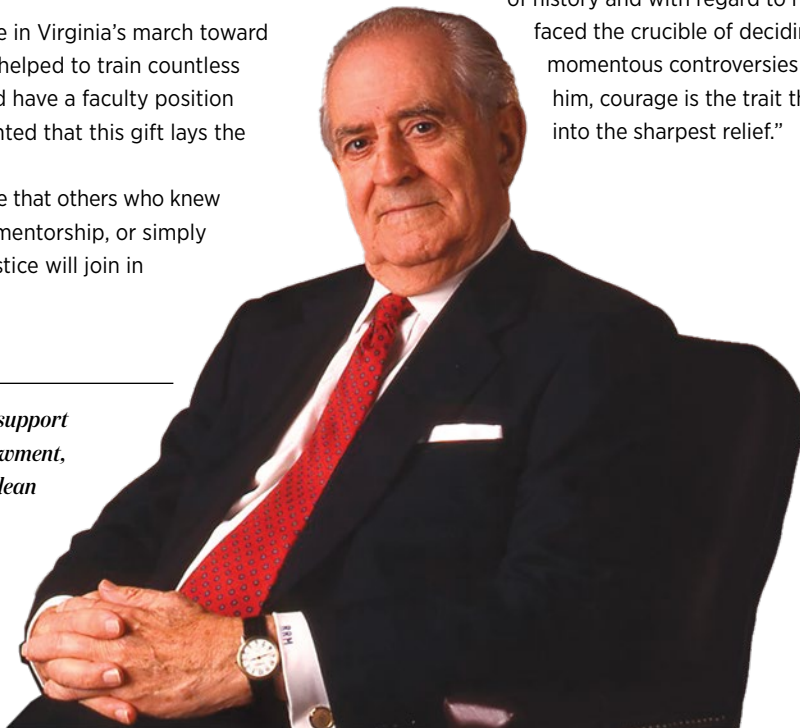
To learn more about opportunities to support the Robert R. Merhige Jr. faculty endowment, please contact Allie Carter, associate dean for development & alumni relations, at acarter2@richmond.edu or (804) 287-6463.



PERSONAL REFLECTION

In September of 2017, law professor Mary Tate, who has been on the faculty at Richmond Law for 20 years and directs the Institute for Actual Innocence Clinic, authored a piece honoring Judge Merhige. Tate clerked for him early in her legal career. In an excerpt from “Personal Reflections on the Honorable Robert R. Merhige Jr.: A Judge, Mentor, and Friend,” she wrote:

“Reflecting about my time with Judge Merhige ...what comes to me now is his singular interest in people’s stories, his pragmatism, and his sense of personal loyalty to those he considered friends. These are the predominant traits that I experienced at his side. As a matter of history and with regard to how he faced the crucible of deciding the momentous controversies before him, courage is the trait that comes into the sharpest relief.”





Above: Dean Wendy Perdue (l) with Mary Lou Kramer, L'75 (r).

Below: Jane Brown Ranson, L'1923 (l), Lily Goodman, L'27 (r).

Blazing a Trail... Again!

Thanks to 107 generous donors, Richmond Law has awarded the first Law Women's Centennial Scholarship.

In honor of the 100th anniversary of Richmond Law's first female graduate, Jane Brown Ranson, L'1923, lead donor Mary Lou Kramer, L'75, committed \$50,000 in matching funds to establish the Law Women's Centennial Scholarship. Thanks to 107 generous donors, we exceeded this challenge, raising more than \$120,000! The first award was made this fall to a deserving 1L student, Lily Goodman.

Lily began her journey to Richmond Law through an unexpected path: a modeling job in Raleigh, North Carolina. At 13 years old, Lily was cast in the Department of Homeland Security's "Blue Campaign," a human trafficking awareness

initiative. Inspired to get involved in combating the issue, Lily connected with the Model Alliance, a New York-based nonprofit, which was lobbying for the Child Model Act. The bill provided critical protections for child models, including reducing their risk of being trafficked.

Lily found herself speaking at press conferences alongside influential models, senators, and human rights advocates in support of the bill's

passage. That fall, it was enacted and became law in New York. Lily's participation in this legislative process at an early age left a lasting impression, solidifying her desire to pursue a career in law.

A trailblazer in her own right, it was only fitting that Lily would become the inaugural recipient of a scholarship that honors Ranson.



To learn more about opportunities to support the Law Women's Centennial Scholarship, please contact Allie Carter, associate dean for development & alumni relations, at acarter2@richmond.edu or (804) 287-6463.

EQUATION FOR A NEW SCHOLARSHIP

\$50,000

in matching funds from
generous lead donor

+

107

additional generous donors

=

\$120,000

raised and new
scholarship established!

***“I will remember
this opportunity
as I progress in
the field and aim
to open doors for
future women, as
Jane Brown Ranson
did for me.”***

— Lily Goodman, L'27

“Because of women like Jane Brown Ranson, I was able to get where I am now,” she said. “It is such an honor to have received a scholarship created in recognition of her and the path she paved for women lawyers in Richmond.

“I chose to go to law school to garner the tools to bring about positive change in society through law,” she continued. “I will remember this opportunity as I progress in the field and aim to open doors for future women, as Jane Brown Ranson did for me.

“I am incredibly grateful to all the donors who made this scholarship possible. Thank you!”



STUDENT SUPPORT

Richmond Law prioritizes the well-being of our students through a combination of education, programming, events, materials, and direct services.



Embracing Authenticity

New “Belonging in Practice” series helps students navigate cultural competency and identity in the legal profession.

How can I be my whole self and be a lawyer? In what kind of workplace environment will I thrive? What type of law practice will allow me to be my most authentic self?

These are some of the key questions being explored in the law school’s new “Belonging in Practice” cultural competency series, led by Sara Tandy, assistant dean of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

“Cultural competency and professional identity are important areas, and lie squarely in line with belonging, inclusion, our sense of self, our identities, and who we want to be as lawyers,” they said. “So, the goal of this series is to help students navigate that professional identity while embracing their authentic selves.”

The series aims to assure students that success in the legal profession does not require

them to abandon their identity. Instead, it encourages them to find environments where they can thrive authentically. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing how personal values, cultural backgrounds, and unique traits can positively contribute to one’s legal practice, rather than detract from it.

“We want students to understand they should never feel the need to change who they are.”

— Sara Tandy, Assistant Dean of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

“We want students to understand they should never feel the need to change who they are,” Tandy continued. “Rather, they should find environments where they can flourish while being fully themselves.”

Throughout the year, the series will address topics like career options beyond traditional paths, pursuing justice in various forms, and handling feedback in the profession, all aimed at equipping students with the tools they need to succeed without compromising their identity.

To learn about opportunities to participate in the Belonging in Practice series, contact Sara Tandy at sara.tandy@richmond.edu.



Legal Connections

Student-focused series expands legal networks one meal at a time.

Since its inception, the Richmond Law & Business Forum has been connecting law students with attorneys in a variety of business law practice areas. The most popular format for making these connections is the forum's Business Law Over Dinner series.

Each dinner connects 1-3 lawyers — often alumni — with 6-10 students interested in their specific practice area, providing valuable networking opportunities and insights from the real world.

"This format allows truly meaningful exchange to take place," said Professor Jessica Erickson, the Nancy Litchfield Hicks Professor of Law, who launched the forum in 2021. "A nice dinner takes a while, and this extended time allows participants to really open up and get comfortable in the conversation. By the end of each dinner, students feel like they've learned so much more than they would from a presentation or traditional networking event."

This fall, dinners are planned with lawyers who specialize in real estate law, in-house practice, and business litigation. The Forum has been so popular that the law school also launched a Criminal Justice Forum led by Professor Dave Johnson, L'83, and in the future, hopes to expand the opportunity to include other legal career pathways.

"This format allows truly meaningful exchange to take place."

— Professor Jessica Erickson

Students explored the role of in-house counsel at a "Law over Dinner" event with Kendall Tan, L'14 of Truist, Jessica Barile, L'14 of Virginia Credit Union, and Jay Kiley, L'12 of AvePoint.

To learn about opportunities to participate in the Law and Business Forum, contact Professor Jessica Erickson at jerickso@richmond.edu.

MEDIA MENTIONS



Law faculty in the news

Highlighting Richmond Law in the media extends the academic reach and reputation of the school and helps amplify our profile across the region, United States, and the world. Law faculty are sought-after experts, who are frequently quoted in national and local media and major trade publications about their research, adding perspective to the news of the day.

The New York Times Law professor **Marissa Jackson Sow**, a former deputy commissioner at New York City's Commission on Human Rights, was quoted in "Eric Adams Praised a Reporter's Body. It Wasn't His First Such Remark."

Sow said the mayor's comments violated the city's own guidance on sexual harassment. "When you are putting attention on someone's physique and appearance, it can make that person uncomfortable in their workplace," she said. "It doesn't matter if it was in jest — it's not about intent. It's about impact."

AP S.D. Roberts and Sandra Moore Professor of Law **Corinna Lain**, a leading scholar on the death penalty, whose book, *Secrets of the Killing State: The Untold Story of Lethal Injection* will be published next spring, was quoted

in "Report: Belief death penalty is applied unfairly shows capital punishment's growing isolation in US." The article was republished by more than 400 additional media outlets.

Lain said she thinks the number of states that don't have the death penalty could easily rise to 40. But a nationwide ban would need action from the U.S. Supreme Court which is unlikely to happen as recent actions show the high court is not going to get in the way of states carrying out executions.

POLITICO Law professor **Joel Eisen**, an energy law expert, was quoted in "Chevron's first solar casualty."

"Another option would be for the court to greenlight the project using a different legal rationale, such as something called Skidmore deference. Under Skidmore, a court can defer to an agency's long-standing interpretation of statutes."

BUSINESS INSIDER Law professor **Danielle Stokes**, an environmental law expert, was quoted in "Make America Build Again."

"Until there is some sort of federal agreement on rapid deployment of renewable energy, or high-speed rail, or electric vehicle charging stations — it's increasingly difficult to have systems that in the aggregate will effect change," she said.

The Washington Post Professor **Kurt Lash**, the E. Claiborne Robins Distinguished Professor of Law and 14th Amendment expert, was quoted in "Did Trump commit insurrection on Jan. 6? The Supreme Court could decide."

Without a clear answer on whether the presidency is subject to Section 3, Lash said, Trump should be allowed on the ballot. The U.S. is governed by the idea "that we're ruled by the people, that our fundamental rules come from the considered deliberation and decision of the people themselves," he said. "So you look for evidence that they engaged in considered deliberation, and here I don't think we have it."

CNN Law professor **Kevin Woodson** was interviewed in "How the 'Black Ceiling' is holding some professionals and the economy back."

"Racial discomfort encapsulates the sense of unease that a lot of Black professionals experience working in elite white work settings," said Woodson. "It consists of a stigma anxiety, which is essentially the apprehension that Black professionals face in recognizing that some of their colleagues might be biased and might treat them unfairly."

2024 Entering Class

133 STUDENTS

25 STATES, PLUS WASHINGTON D.C.

164
MEDIAN LSAT

75% RECEIVED SCHOLARSHIP AID RANGING FROM \$10K TO FULL TUITION

\$41,225 AVERAGE SCHOLARSHIP

3.75
MEDIAN GPA

Graduates

90.6%
EMPLOYMENT RATE for Class of 2023

5,000 HOURS OF PRO BONO SERVICE
performed by students during the 2023-24 academic year

School Life

130 STUDENTS RECEIVED SUMMER PUBLIC SERVICE FELLOWSHIPS

53 STUDENTS ENROLLED IN CLINICS

48 STUDENTS COMPLETED JUDICIAL INTERNSHIPS

121 CLIENTS ASSISTED THROUGH CLINICS

Giving

1,274 GIFTS OF \$100 OR LESS TOTALING MORE THAN **\$75,000**

\$211,360
RAISED from Law Spiders during the University's 6th annual Giving Day

\$2.7M+ TOTAL COMMITTED to the Dean's Opportunity Scholarship Fund, which celebrates its 5th anniversary this year

\$1.1M+ IN TOTAL GIVING DAY GIFTS to Richmond Law since inception in 2019

LAW LEADERS

The mission of Richmond Law is to educate lawyers to think critically, act ethically, advocate zealously, serve compassionately, and advance the broader social good of their communities. Our students lead on- and off-campus. Our alumni have successful careers and give back. Our professors are experts in their fields and are among the best teacher-scholars in the nation.



Passionate Advocate

Meet Gracie Elliot, Richmond Law SBA President

Gracie Elliot, L'25, may be a self-proclaimed “horse girl” with a love for crafting, but she’s also a passionate leader and advocate for her fellow students at Richmond Law. Hailing from Kentucky, Elliot had initially set her sights on several other law schools, but her visit to Richmond Law changed everything.

“When I stepped on campus, it felt like Hogwarts,” she laughs, reflecting on her first impressions of the school’s charm. “Within 15 minutes of sitting through a presentation, I knew this was where I needed to be.”

Since that pivotal moment, Elliot’s experience at Richmond Law has been nothing short of transformative, culminating in her latest role as president of Richmond Law’s Student Bar Association for the 2024–25 academic year.

Her journey in the SBA began in her 1L year, and she worked through various positions before taking on the role of president.

Above, Gracie Elliot (center) with Dean Wendy Perdue (left) and University of Richmond President Kevin F. Hallock (right).

“To me, this is about advocacy for my peers,” she said. “Being involved in SBA has opened doors to connect with students I would not have otherwise met and to make a difference in their law school experience.”

As SBA president, her primary goals are transparency, communication, and fostering a sense of community among her fellow students. She believes in creating open lines of dialogue between students and the administration, ensuring that student concerns are heard and addressed.

“Being involved in SBA has opened doors to connect with students I wouldn’t have otherwise met and to make a difference in their law school experience.”

— *Gracie Elliot, Richmond Law Student Bar Association President*

“I want to be approachable, for students to feel comfortable coming to me with their concerns, even if I can’t always fix them,” she said.

One aspect of her journey to which she credits her success is the financial support she has received through scholarships.

“It has eased the financial burden of attending a private institution and helped me feel more confident in my decision to come to Richmond,” she said. “Any financial support reduces the stress of paying off loans later and makes it easier to focus on what really matters, pursuing a career that I’m passionate about.”

As she reflects on her journey so far, Elliot is filled with gratitude — not only for the support she’s received, but also for the community she’s been able to help shape at Richmond.

“I love this school. I’m grateful for the opportunity to advocate for my peers, and I’m thankful to the donors who make all of this possible.”

STUDENTS LEADING THE WAY



Student Organizations

Richmond Law offers nearly 40 student organizations, allowing students to delve deep into their interests with their like-minded peers.



Student Ambassadors

From welcoming new faces on Admitted Students Day to helping to manage New Student Orientation, our Student Ambassadors offer a firsthand view of the Richmond Law experience.



Law Journals

The *Public Interest Law Review*, *Journal of Law and Technology*, and *Richmond Law Review* give students the opportunity to explore their scholarly interests.

Access to Justice

From student to teacher, Richmond Law alumna leads new clinic.



Richmond Law has launched a new Access to Justice Clinic, where the student has become the teacher.

Led by former legal aid attorney Cassie Powell, L'16, the clinic is designed to provide critical legal services to underserved communities while giving law students hands-on experience.

"I envision this as a mini legal aid office within the University, where students can develop real-world litigation skills while helping those in need," she said.

Powell's vision for the clinic has been heavily influenced by her own experience as a student participating in the Jeanette Lipman Children's Defense Clinic led by Professor Julie McConnell and the Carrico Center for Pro Bono Service led by Professor Tara Casey. She also credits Professors Mary Tate and Meredith Harbach with

being mentors to her as a rising lawyer.

"When I was a student here, I felt very supported by the faculty," she said. "I really love being able to be that for the students just as the faculty, many of whom are still here, were for me."

In addition to practical skills like client management, negotiation, and courtroom advocacy, the clinic encourages students to grapple with deeper questions around access to justice.

"The clinic is about more than just skills-building," Powell said. "It's an opportunity for students to think critically about their professional responsibility to improve the legal system."

By participating in the clinic, students explore how they can incorporate access to justice into their future careers, whether through pro bono work, legal aid, or other forms of community engagement. In this way, the former student has returned to guide the next generation of advocates.

"The clinic is ... an opportunity for students to think critically about their professional responsibility to improve the legal system."

— Cassie Powell, L'16

WELCOME TO THE FACULTY

This year, we're delighted to welcome four new members to the Richmond Law faculty. Please join us in welcoming:



Lauren Clatch

Assistant Professor of Law

Lauren Clatch joins Richmond Law from Duke University School of Law where she was a post-doctoral fellow in the Wilson Center for Science and Justice. Broadly, her scholarship relies on psychological theory and quantitative methods with the aim of developing richer and more realistic accounts of human behavior in legal contexts. Clatch clerked for the Hon. Carolyn King on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit prior to joining academia.

She holds a J.D. and Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Minnesota, an M.A. in forensic psychology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and a B.A. in psychology and English from Washington University in St. Louis.



Tom Donnelly

Assistant Professor of Law

Tom Donnelly joins Richmond Law from Harvard Law School where he served as a Climenko Fellow and Lecturer on Law. He specializes in constitutional theory, American political development, civic education, and American constitutional history. Prior to joining academia, he clerked for the Hon. Thomas Ambro on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit and held positions at the National Constitution Center and Constitutional Accountability Center.

Donnelly holds a J.D. from Yale Law School, an M.A. in politics from Princeton University, and a B.A. in philosophy from Georgetown University. Currently a doctoral candidate, he will receive a Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University in 2025.



Robin Meier, '97

Assistant Professor of Law, Legal Practice

Robin Meier joined the Richmond Law faculty as a visiting professor in 2019, and this year, transitioned to the faculty full time. She teaches Legal Analysis & Writing, and Legal Analysis in Practice. Prior to entering academia, she clerked for the Hon. Robert B. King on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia, and practiced litigation at Covington & Burling LLP.

In addition to an undergraduate degree in English and political science from University of Richmond, she holds a J.D. from William & Mary Law School.



Cassie Powell, L'16

Assistant Professor of Law, Legal Practice & Director, Access to Justice Clinic

Cassie Powell (featured on page 12) joins Richmond Law as inaugural director of the school's Access to Justice Clinic. Prior to joining academia, Powell was managing attorney of Virginia Legal Aid Society's Suffolk office where she led a team of attorneys and paralegals serving individuals with limited incomes in a broad range of civil legal areas.

She earned a dual J.D. and M.S.W. from Richmond Law and Virginia Commonwealth University respectively, and holds a B.A. from the College of William & Mary.





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 The Hon. George D. Varoutsos, '73 and
 Sandra Varoutsos♦
 Robin and Michael H. Wall, '07♦
 Frances and Preston D. Wigner, '97
 Lane and Charles F. Witthoefft, '72♦

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Salua Kamerow, '22
Claire M. Pitzer, '26
Natalie K. Shaw, '17♦

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Philip R. Strunk

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2004

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Bridget A. Murray
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Elaine S. Ryan

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Lee R. Shubert
Paris R. Sorrell◆

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Orlando A. Woodson

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Erika R. MacCormac
W. Davis Powell
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Andrew G. Schutte◆

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Siri G. Wiggins ♦

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Richard D. Palmieri ♦
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“Although my path veered away from the traditional practice of law, I use the education I received at the law school every single day. It is my honor to give a little something back so others have the opportunity for such an impactful and transformative experience.”

— Andrew P. Stepanian, L'00
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OUR HONOR ROLL



“Go forth in peace ... be kind to one another ... strengthen the faint hearted, support the weak, help the suffering.’ Week after week, year after year, I have heard these words of benediction at the close of worship services and sought to live accordingly. How, then, might I also seek to perpetuate these deeply held values of mine following my passing from this mortal life? The answer, for me, is simple and obvious: I have designated a bequest to the University of Richmond School of Law to establish a fund that will support the law school’s wonderful clinical programs. I know the law school’s outstanding administration, faculty, and students will utilize this gift to offer hope and foster equity and justice for ‘the faint hearted, ... the weak, ... the suffering,’ and so many others – and I am so very grateful!”

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February 28: Journal of Law and
Technology Symposium

April 9-10: 7th Annual UR Here Giving Day

May 16-17: Law Alumni Weekend