

WELCOME

These are the prepared remarks of the opening speakers of the March 29, 2019 UDC LAW REVIEW symposium.

Remarks of John Brittain

Good morning. My name is John Brittain. I am the current Acting Dean of the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law.

It is my utmost pleasure to welcome you to our law school and to the 2019 UDC Law Review Symposium—*Disability Rights: Past, Present, and Future*.

Each year, through our clinical and experiential programs, our students and faculty provide over 100,000 hours of legal services to D.C. residents in need.

The students of the UDC Law Review wanted to host a symposium this year that matches the mission of the law school – “*using the law to help those in need to reshape our community*.” And they found that disability rights is an area of the law that deserves much attention.

Today, you will hear from experts, academics, practitioners, community advocates and others on the advances that came after the enactment of the *ADA Amendments Act of 2008*, but also remaining issues that impact individuals with disabilities today.

I want to personally thank the students, faculty, and staff that have worked arduously to make this event possible.

And I want to thank you for joining us today in this very important moment in the history of disability rights.

I now would like to pass it over to the UDC LAW REVIEW Editor-in-Chief, Demetria Themistocles.

Thank you and enjoy today’s robust program.

Remarks of Demetria Themistocles

Thank you, Dean Brittain. Welcome everyone! My name is Demetria Themistocles and I am the Editor-in-Chief of the UDC LAW REVIEW. I want to welcome you and tell you about two things: why disability rights; and why UDC.

Highlighting disability law for our UDC LAW REVIEW symposium is actually a bit personal. My brother, Myles, has several disabilities, including Autism Spectrum Disorder. Myles is the reason I came to law school. Being the older sister of a single-parent household, I've played the role of a tough father, negotiator, and advocate. Being in law school, I have become both disturbed and inspired by how laws treat people with disabilities. Since 1L year, I've taken every nugget of useful information I can and call my Mom to say, what about this? How about we use this? Myles is going to have a sister who will advocate for him forever, but I want my work, OUR work, to go beyond ourselves and our loved ones. My goal is to be an ally in this disability rights movement.

In addition to my personal experiences, disability law is simply not often discussed in legal academia. We wanted to contribute to this area of law by hosting this symposium, and next year, publishing articles that will affect our laws, public policy, community organization, and advocacy in the disability rights movement.

Now, why UDC? UDC has a unique history with disability law. Our first director of the Legislation Clinic was one of the chief architects of the ADA—Bob Bergdorf—and commitment to working on public policy to support disability rights remains at the heart of the Legislation Clinic today through their valuable work. In addition to the Legislation Clinic, for decades under the leadership of Joe Tulman, our Juvenile and Special Education Clinic has worked to support children with disabilities and their families in school disciplinary proceedings and IEP processes, and this work continues under Professor Lauren Onkeles-Klein. Further, all of our clinics have worked with this community in some capacity, including immigration, housing, and criminal justice.

I have the distinct pleasure of introducing The ADA Project, which I have personally worked on since the beginning of last summer. The ADA Project is a new online portal--available at www.adalawproject.org--designed to provide information about the ADA and ADA AAA. The website is a joint project between the UDC Legislation Clinic and the Quinnipiac University Civil Justice Clinic and includes materials from Chai Feldblum's personal collection. These materials relate to the definition of disability, emerging areas of the law, and legislative history.

Today, The ADA Project is collecting stories to document the history and impact of the ADA, as amended by the ADA AAA. These stories will be compiled and incorporated on The ADA Project website. If you would like to share your experiences with the law, UDC Legislation Clinic students are in room 507 to welcome you and gather your story.

Thank you to the UDC LAW REVIEW Editorial Board and staff, who have been instrumental in creating this event.

Thank you to members of the Law Students for Disability Rights, a new student group on campus for which I am co-president.

I specifically want to thank our incredible advisors, Professors Andrew Ferguson and Professor Rafael Cox-Alomar, and specifically Professor Marcy Karin. This event would not be what is it if not for your guidance, support, teaching moments, and overall belief in the cause. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Lastly thank all of you for attending. This event has become bigger than I ever imagined. We are getting a world-wide response, which tells me this event NEEDED to happen.

We have some incredible panels that I cannot wait to attend, so without further ado, I'd like to introduce Professor Kevin Barry to kick off our first plenary session.