

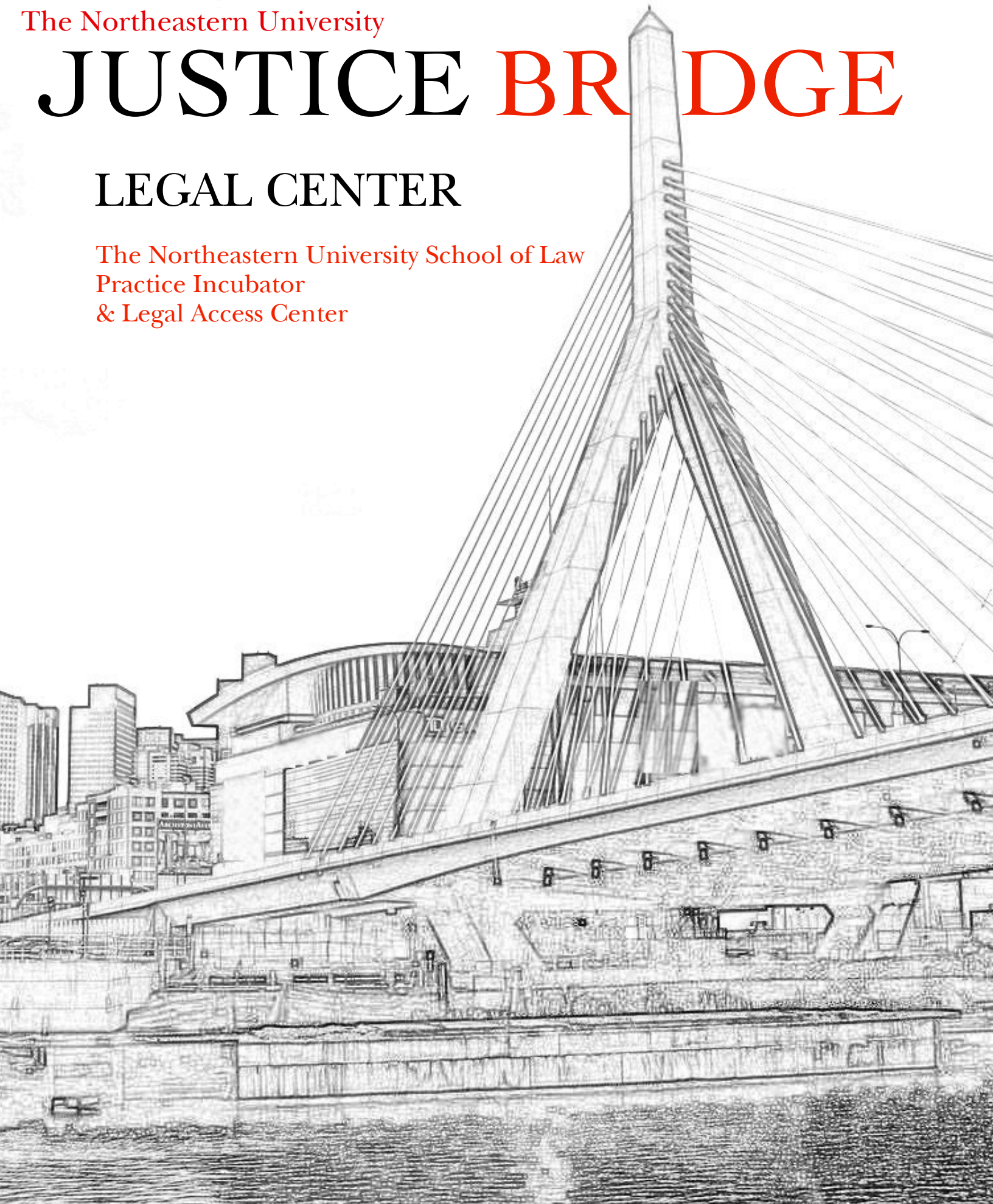
EMPOWERING NEW LAWYERS TO DELIVER QUALITY, AFFORDABLE
LEGAL SERVICES TO CLIENTS OF MODEST MEANS

The Northeastern University

JUSTICE BRIDGE

LEGAL CENTER

The Northeastern University School of Law
Practice Incubator
& Legal Access Center

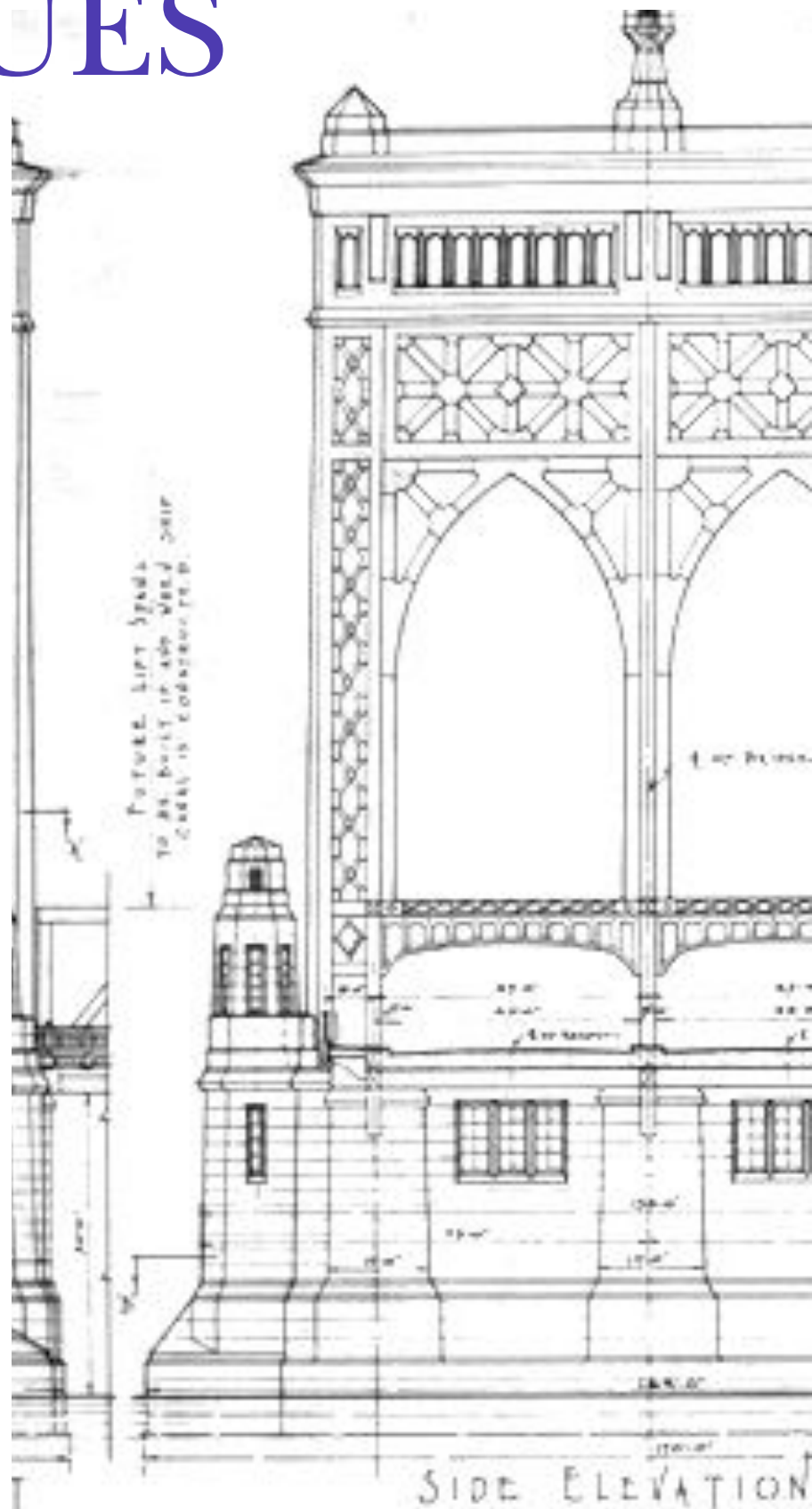


THE ISSUES

As a recognized innovator in skills-based legal education with a commitment to public service, the Northeastern University School of Law is launching a new endeavor to help its graduates bring legal services to people who are struggling to afford them.

The Northeastern University Justice Bridge Center has been designed to address two core challenges confronting the American justice system: shrinking employment opportunities for recent graduates under existing law firm structures, and the legal system's growing inability to serve consumers of modest means who cannot afford high hourly rates but fail to qualify for pro-bono assistance.

Building upon "incubator" models developed by other law schools, Justice Bridge intends to take the training and support services offered by such programs to the next level. It not only empowers law graduates with resources and education, it connects them with experienced mentors to give new lawyers working as solo practitioners and in small practices the same advantages shared by junior associates in large, established firms. Justice Bridge is building relationships with top law firms, retired justices and former senior partners, legal service organizations, and various affinity and membership-based community groups to help provide compassionate and professional representation to those with previously unmet legal needs.

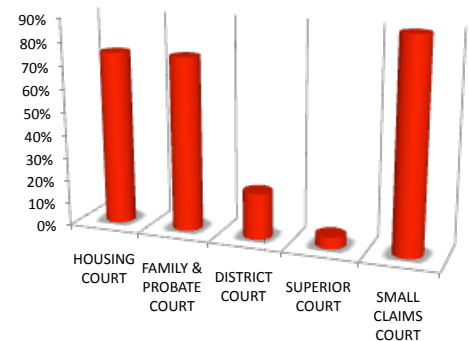


“Equal justice under law ... it is perhaps the most inspiring ideal of our society. It is one of the ends for which our entire legal system exists ... it is fundamental that justice should be the same, in substance and availability, without regard to economic status.”

— U.S. Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, Jr.

THE JUSTICE GAP

Even before the recent economic downturn, people of modest means have been struggling to access high-quality, affordable legal services. Many people who cannot afford to pay market rates for a Boston attorney also earn too much money to qualify for pro-bono (free) assistance. These people have fallen into a “Justice Gap” where they are forced to represent themselves and forego the legal advice and assistance they need.



Rates, by percentage, of parties who represented themselves in Massachusetts Trial Courts.

In 2011, the World Justice Project ranked the United States 11th out of 11 high-income countries in providing access to justice. This year the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts noted a growing trend of self-representation in the Commonwealth’s trial courts, with 75 percent of parties in both the Housing Court and the Family & Probate Court appearing on a pro se basis (see chart).

THE EMPLOYMENT GAP

Slow economic recovery and shifting dynamics in the large-firm business model have left fewer jobs for new attorneys. According to recent employment statistics, only 54.9 percent of graduates from law schools accredited by the American Bar Association found full-time legal work within nine months of commencement. These graduates are often burdened with substantial student loan debt, a factor that leads them to seek work in non-legal professions.

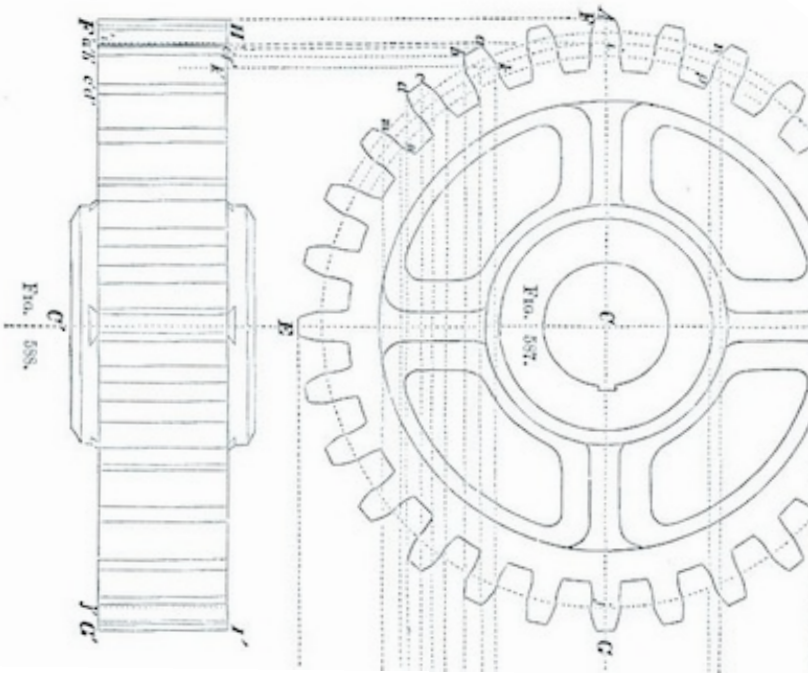
Justice Bridge will provide new NUSL graduates with the resources, mentoring and client referrals necessary to help them become full-time lawyers in solo or small practices that they develop. Unlike most lawyers who “hang out a shingle” directly out of law school, Justice Bridge attorneys will have the chance to develop their skills within a community of other new lawyers in addition to retired judges and experienced practitioners.

BRIDGING THE GAPS

WHAT IS AN ‘ACCESS INCUBATOR?’

Justice Bridge is pioneering a first-of-its-kind program in New England. The incubator is a non-profit organization that will provide office space, resources and client referrals to new attorneys to help meet two objectives:

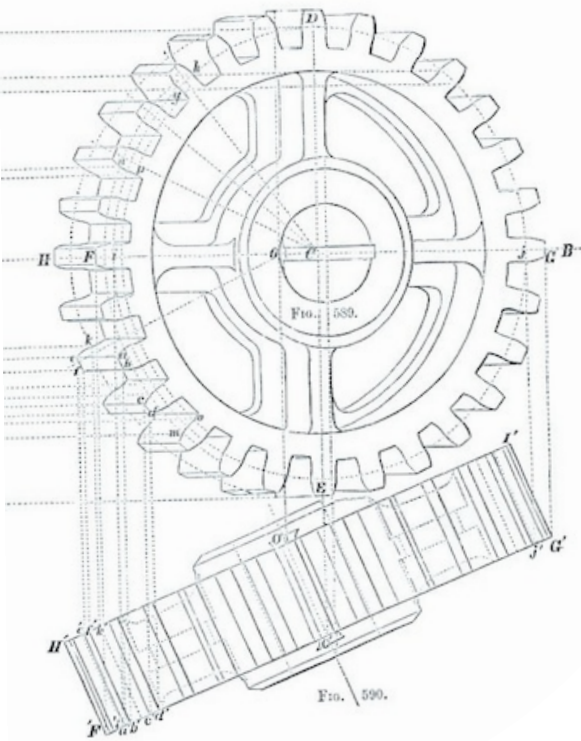
- 1. Provide low-bono (reduced-fee) service, scaled to the income of clients struggling to access legal services and pro bono services to those who qualify but are struggling to find available attorneys at other legal aid organizations.
- 2. Mentor and train new attorneys to give them a competitive edge in the job market or skilled enough to manage their own practices when they leave the incubator.



HOW JUSTICE BRIDGE IS DIFFERENT

Justice Bridge is a not-for-profit legal incubator seeking to provide access to justice by ensuring the strategic and capable delivery of legal services. With these goals in mind, Justice Bridge is developing an economically self-sufficient legal center to serve poor and modest-means clients and a resource hub to serve the Boston legal community.

Justice Bridge is building relationships and working with the legal services community, pro-bono service organizations, anti-poverty community organizations, main street bar associations, regional bar associations, Boston bar associations and public librarian groups to determine how best to deliver legal services.



BRIDGING THE JUSTICE GAP

A BLUEPRINT

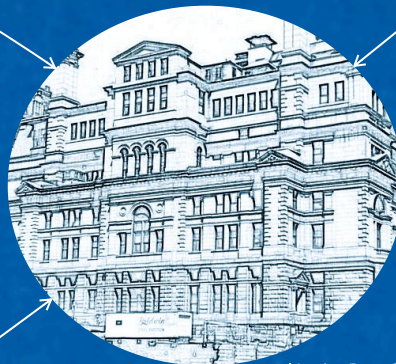
ACTIVE AND RETIRED MENTORS

Networks of attorneys with decades of legal experience will provide advice and direction as needed.

BUILDING A NETWORK WITH LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

SJC ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION
An SJC initiative committed to finding and eliminating barriers to equal justice.

Justice Bridge will be ideally positioned to assist in a strategic deployment of time and resources to aid modest-means clients who have fallen through the cracks.



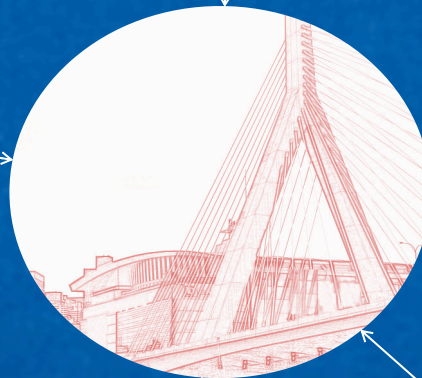
LEGAL AID & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS
Groups with roots in the community will help identify practice areas of greatest need.

LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDERS

Justice Bridge will coordinate with bar associations and law firms to take 'overflow' cases from law practices while seeking guidance and support from established practitioners.

JUSTICE BRIDGE

Under the guidance of experienced, volunteer mentors, entry-level lawyers employed by Justice Bridge will assess cases to identify viable fee-shifting and contingency-fee claims. Cases will then be assigned either to attorneys on the Justice Bridge Referral Panel or handled by in-house lawyers.



In addition to helping clients find affordable attorneys, Justice Bridge will also connect retired attorneys with recent graduates and experienced attorneys for continuing legal education workshops and opportunities to participate in unique and challenging pro bono cases.

JUSTICE BRIDGE ATTORNEY ADVISORY BOARD

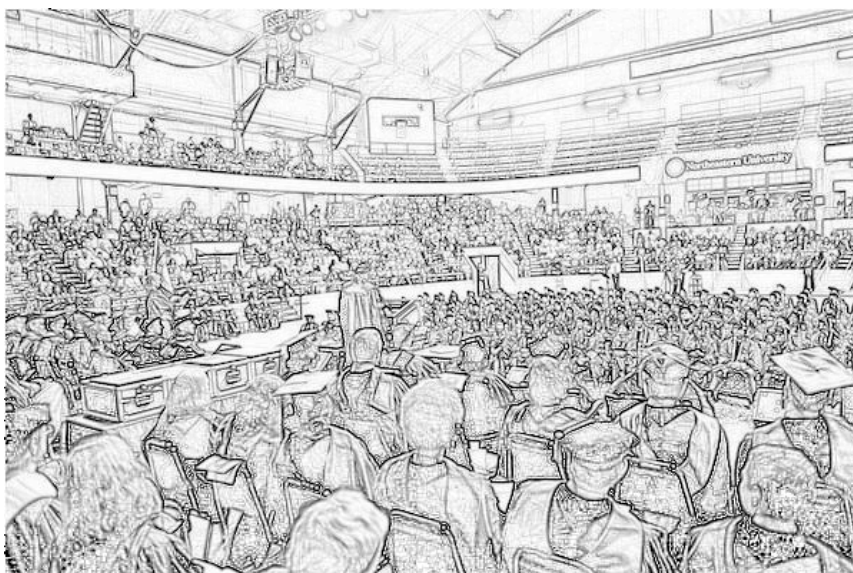
A network of legal, business and community representatives will provide strategic vision and support.

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

NUSL will provide academic and material support. Its law school graduates will fill entry-level lawyer positions.

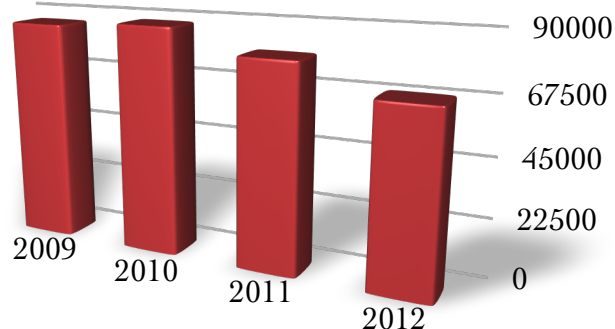
BUILDING LAWYERS MORE THAN A JOB

The mentors in Justice Bridge train new lawyers so they are not only able to take charge of a case, but also ultimately capable of running an independent practice. As part of the initial application process, Justice Bridge attorneys must submit a business plan outlining their legal practice goals. These attorneys then develop and refine their business plans as they participate in the program. Attorneys who complete a two-year term in the Justice Bridge program will then advance into the workforce with a competitive edge crucial for success in today's legal marketplace.



BRIDGING THE EMPLOYMENT GAP

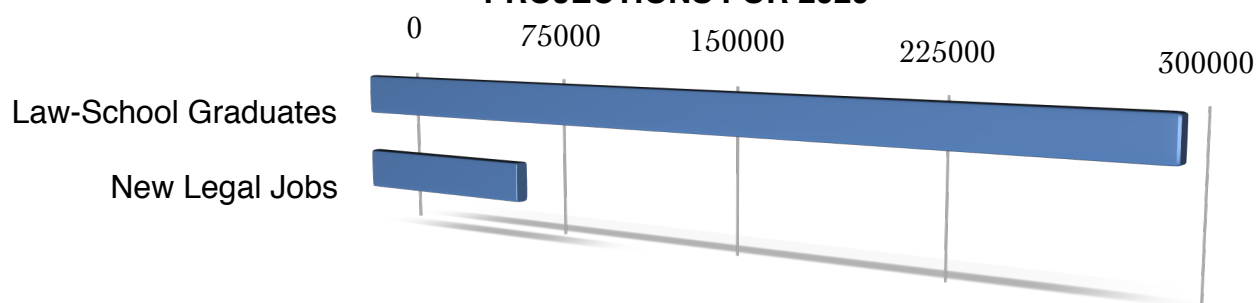
■ LAW SCHOOL APPLICANTS



Data provided by Law School Admissions Council.

In addition to building better lawyers, Justice Bridge will help to ensure that law school graduates are able to use their degrees to help the people who are struggling to access justice. With only 54.9 percent of graduates from ABA-accredited schools able to find employment within nine months of graduation, a large segment of law graduates are migrating to other professions. Poor job prospects have also led to a reduction in law school applicants, leading more would-be attorneys away from the profession and leaving more working-class people to represent themselves.

U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS PROJECTIONS FOR 2020



SUSTAINABILITY

A long-term imperative of Justice Bridge is fiscal independence. As a non-profit incubator — not a law firm — the program will depend on its community partners and affiliate attorneys to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the program. Attorneys will contribute a portion of fees earned from Justice Bridge referrals fees back to Justice Bridge to cover the costs of furnished office space and resources.

START-UP FUNDS

Justice Bridge will need support to bring equal justice to the clients of modest means and new employment opportunities to law school graduates. The center is intent on developing economic self-sufficiency, but for now it must seek supplemental funds to make Justice Bridge an integral and vital partner in the Boston legal community.

GRANTS	The center will seek grants and legal-services contracts from non-profit foundations, particularly affinity organizations and groups dedicated to equal justice. Vouchers may also be contributed to support the incubator's discounted fee structure.
LAW-FIRM SPONSORED FELLOWSHIPS	The center is asking firms to sponsor the initial classes of Justice Bridge lawyers by providing them with start-up grants and funds to provide pro bono legal services to those clients who cannot afford the rates charged by the incubator. These sponsorships will cover the costs of office space, resources and professional liability insurance until Justice Bridge attorneys start generating fees and can contribute back to the program.

CONTACT

LEN ZANDROW, DIRECTOR	BRISTER & ZANDROW, LLP PHONE: (508) 746-9553 E-MAIL: zandrow@bz-law.com
DEBORAH A. RAMIREZ, NUSL FACULTY LIAISON	NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW PHONE: (781) 454-7525 E-MAIL: d.ramirez@neu.edu