

# Mental Health Litigation Practicum: Civil Commitment

## Fighting for the freedom of clients who face stigma and discrimination

The Mental Health Litigation Practicum provides representation for persons allegedly living with mental illness who are facing commitment and involuntary treatment petitions. Students will receive **real-world experience as civil rights advocates** at a time when mental health is at the forefront of our national conversation. Students will litigate issues involving the immediate deprivation of liberty and bodily autonomy.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In this one- or two-semester practicum, each student will gain trial experience defending clients being held involuntarily at local psychiatric hospitals. Students can earn two or three credits, as determined by the student. The anticipated work required will be aligned with the credits earned.

Students are assigned cases by the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS) Mental Health Litigation Division (MHLD) and represent clients under the supervision of a faculty member. In these cases, the hospital has petitioned to have the client involuntarily committed for up to 6 months or recommitted for up to one year and may have petitioned for involuntary treatment during the commitment period. Students meet with their clients at local psychiatric hospitals and develop trial advocacy skills by preparing a defense and defending their clients at bench trials.

As part of their work in the classroom, students examine mental health law and the mental health litigation practice. Students also explore the ethical implications of forced hospitalization and treatment, and learn how race, economic status and difference in identity, experience, and values can impact entry into the mental health system, diagnosis, treatment, and access to less restrictive alternatives.

We warmly welcome all applicants and remind students that Boston University policy prohibits discrimination against any individual on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, military service, pregnancy or pregnancy-related condition, or because of marital, parental, or veteran status, and acts in conformity with all applicable state and federal laws. This policy extends to all BU Law academic programs.

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

This Practicum creates a unique opportunity to litigate trials over the course of one- or two-semester. Students are provided with the rewarding and meaningful chance to advocate on behalf of often misunderstood and stigmatized individuals by making sure they have a seat at the table to make their own medical decisions.