

Professor Leslie Salzman

Director of Clinical Education & Co-Director of the Bet Tzedek Clinic

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Leslie Salzman oversees clinical education at Cardozo Law School. A member of the faculty since 1990, Professor Salzman has been involved in individual and class action litigation involving rights under the Constitution, Americans with Disabilities Act, Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare laws, the Federal Housing Act, and various consumer protection laws. She also mediates community, custody/visitation, and criminal cases in the community mediation centers in Manhattan and Brooklyn. As a member of the mediation panel of the Southern District of New York she mediates cases involving the rights of individuals with disabilities.

Professor Rebekah Diller

Clinical Associate Professor of Law & Co-Director of the Bet Tzedek Clinic

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Rebekah Diller joined Cardozo from the Brennan Center at New York University, where she was Deputy Director of the Justice Program and an Adjunct Clinical Professor of Law. At the Brennan Center, Diller spearheaded research, advocacy and litigation to expand access to justice for low-income families. Her work included a successful campaign in Congress to remove a restriction on federally funded legal services attorneys, co-authoring several groundbreaking reports on court fees and debtor's prison, and litigation against unconstitutional conditions on federal grant programs. Previously, she was as an attorney at the New York Civil Liberties Union, Housing Works and Legal Services for the Elderly in Queens.

An 85-year-old woman faced forced placement in a nursing home because Medicaid would no longer provide the home-care services that made it possible for her to remain in her home of 45 years.

A 78-year-old man was charged more than \$40,000 for critical surgery because his Medicare HMO had not informed him of the procedures necessary to have that care covered by his HMO.

A young man with AIDS was threatened with eviction by his landlord, who claimed he was not a tenant, even though she had accepted rent from him and AIDS Services that was double the legal rent for a rundown studio apartment.

In each of these cases, students of the Bet Tzedek Legal Services Clinic were successful in protecting the interests of their clients and regaining for them their health benefits and/or homes. Each year, Bet Tzedek—which means “House of Justice” in Hebrew—represents dozens of elderly and disabled people seeking health, disability, and housing benefits that they could not get without Clinic assistance.

In representing these individual clients, the student lawyers also identify systemic problems affecting thousands of similarly situated people. Often, the result is a class action lawsuit to correct these problems. As a result of Bet Tzedek class actions, thousands of New Yorkers are protected from arbitrary reductions in their home-care services; the Social Security Administration has changed its restrictive policies for determining when HIV-positive individuals are eligible for benefits; hundreds of disabled applicants for public housing are protected from the public housing authority's intrusion into their confidential medical records.

The Clinic operates with 25 students and 3 full-time faculty, with a case load of more than 200 clients. Clients are referred by agencies and courts that are familiar with the reputation of the Clinic and its faculty, Professors Leslie Salzman and Rebekah Diller—respected litigators and educators in the fields of elder, disability, health, and housing law. Supervised by the Clinic faculty, students have primary responsibility to interview clients and potential witnesses; investigate the facts; develop legal theories based on extensive legal research; draft pleadings, motions, and briefs; argue motions; conduct hearings and trials before administrative agencies in state and federal courts; negotiate settlements; and counsel clients.

In a required, year-long seminar on social welfare litigation theory and practice, students learn the skills and substantive law that they use in representing Clinic clients, and also address the ethical issues facing them as advocates.