



UC Davis School of Law
Water Justice Clinic
Director Camille Pannu

The U.C. Davis Martin Luther King, Jr. School of Law has launched an exciting new Water Justice Clinic designed to advocate for clean, healthy and adequate water supplies for all Californians. The new Clinic is a project of the Aoki Center for Critical Race and Nation Studies, in partnership with the California Environmental Law and Policy Center, and will offer unique environmental justice advocacy opportunities for King Hall students.

Currently, over one million California residents lack access to clean, safe, and affordable drinking water. An overwhelming percentage of those residents live in rural California, and represent communities of color. The barriers to accessing clean water are not limited to environmental issues, and lack of access to water imposes a significant financial burden on low-income families, while also resulting in increased rates of obesity, shorter life expectancies and decreased learning outcomes for children.

However, very few rural legal services attorneys are able to litigate water law cases, and no legal services attorneys offer transactional legal support to these California residents. King Hall's Water Justice Clinic seeks to fill that gap by identifying viable drinking water solutions and then implementing those solutions by providing transactional legal support to the affected low-income, rural communities.

Prominent environmental justice expert Camille Pannu has been recruited to lead the Water Justice Clinic as its inaugural director. Pannu, a Berkeley Law alum, was passionate about environmental justice issues even as a law student. After law school, Pannu worked on environmental justice cases for the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment as an Equal Justice Works Fellow in the San Joaquin Valley. Before coming to King Hall, she

also clerked for District Judge Stefan Underhill in Connecticut and Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Richard Paez.

The overarching goal of the new Clinic is to insure that all Californians have access to clean, affordable and safe drinking water, primarily by strengthening rural community water systems. The Clinic will also advocate for policies that fund needed improvements to those systems, address groundwater contamination, and ensure that rural voices are fully represented in future California water management decisions.

Recent headlines about the drinking water scandal in Flint, Michigan and—closer to home—the water crisis faced by East Porterville residents in the southern San Joaquin Valley have prompted action by California legislators and voters to confront those problems directly. Proposition 1A on California’s November 2014 ballot contained funding to provide assistance to California’s disadvantaged communities, and King Hall’s Water Justice Clinic is made possible by a three-year grant of Proposition 1A funds by the State Water Resources Control Board. Indeed, the Clinic is the primary legal services provider among the organizations funded by these Proposition 1A grants.

Clinic Director Pannu reports that King Hall students will play a critical role in assisting these communities by enrolling in the clinical program each semester. There they will partner with grassroots community organizations such as the Community Water Center, while also obtaining classroom training from Pannu in water justice and related issues.