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School of Law to Launch New Family Violence Clinic

ORANGE, Calif., June 20, 2007 The Chapman University School of Law will launch a new Family Violence Clinic this fall, aimed at helping low-income families overcome the challenges of domestic violence. It will be staffed by law students and directed by a School of Law faculty member who is a veteran immigration lawyer. The clinic plans to offer free family law counseling to both documented and undocumented residents of Orange County.

The Chapman Family Violence Clinic was created to address the unique challenges faced by survivors of domestic violence, said clinic director Marisa Cianciarulo. It will offer an amazing opportunity for Chapman law students to help people in our community and to hone their skills by counseling real clients within weeks of beginning the fall semester.

The program is the third major clinic created by the Chapman law school that offers free legal assistance to low-income or underserved populations. The others are the Tax Law Clinic, launched in 1997, in which law students advocate for disadvantaged taxpayers in efficient resolution of tax complications, and the Alona Cortese Elder Law Clinic, created in 2005, in which students provide legal assistance to local senior citizens.

The Chapman Family Violence Clinic will follow a unique model that Professor Cianciarulo learned as a student at the American University Washington College of Law and honed over nearly three years as a clinical teaching fellow at Villanova University School of Law. Unlike externships, where student work supports a program director, the Chapman Family Violence Clinic gives students primary responsibility for cases and direct interaction with clients. This model is facilitated by special immigration regulations that allow students enrolled in clinical courses to do anything a lawyer can do, as long as there is supervision by a licensed attorney.

Participating law students will engage in client counseling and interviews, fact investigation, legal research, preparation of affidavits, writing legal arguments, and submitting applications for domestic-violence-related immigration benefits. Each of these areas will be covered extensively in classroom components taught by Professor Cianciarulo that will include interview simulations, student peer review, and case rounds.

I feel it is crucial to the learning process to allow the students to run the show, with my supervision, said Professor Cianciarulo. The clinic offers 3 units for the semester program, with 10 hours of combined classroom and field work per week. "The amount of student effort is actually dictated by the needs of the client, not a per-week hourly requirement, noted the professor, who added, Students become very attached to the clients and their cases, and they are struck at how much of a role they can play in a person's life.