

Rochelle Krebs '09 J.D. benefits from the Law School's Loan Repayment Assistance Program to forge a public interest career path many years after graduation

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For Rochelle Krebs '09 J.D., the journey to a career in public interest law was not typical. Not until several years after earning her law degree from Notre Dame Law School did she begin practicing full time in civil legal aid, helping survivors of domestic violence in the Seattle area. Now, she is qualified to use the Law School's Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP), which is helping her pay her student loans while she pursues a career in public interest law.

As a student, Krebs was interested in human rights law and was drawn to Notre Dame Law School by the opportunity to interact with the Klau Center for Civil and Human Rights. Krebs was committed to a public interest legal career, and honored as the 2009 recipient of the Conrad Kellenberg Award for community service during law school.

During winter break of her 1L year, she participated in [Galilee](https://link:/academics/experiential-courses/galilee/) [\[link:/academics/experiential-courses/galilee/\]](https://link:/academics/experiential-courses/galilee/), a unique immersion program in which Notre Dame Law students meet with lawyers at government agencies and nonprofit organizations to learn about the legal challenges facing the poor and disenfranchised. Krebs, who is originally from Washington state, participated in Seattle. She had the opportunity to meet Washington Supreme Court Justice Mary Yu '93 J.D., who was then a trial court judge in King County Superior Court.

Krebs remembers Yu telling the Galilee group that there was a need for high-quality lawyers in family law. The judge said many of the parties in family law cases had to represent themselves.

"At the time, I thought 'I am not going into family law,' and now I have ended up doing exactly that," Krebs said.

However, that didn't happen right away. After law school, she and Jeffrey Caffee '09 J.D., who she met at Notre Dame, returned to the Seattle area and started their family. There, Caffee began his career in litigation and eventually opened his own personal injury law firm, while Krebs stayed at home with their two sons. Still dedicated to serving the public interest, Krebs volunteered over 1500 pro bono hours to low-income immigrants and domestic violence survivors.

It wasn't until 2017, over eight years after receiving her degree, that Krebs became employed full time as a staff attorney at Eastside Legal Assistance Program. The nonprofit provides free civil legal aid services to low-income residents of eastern King County, Washington, and to low-income survivors of domestic violence throughout King County. Krebs provides counsel on a variety of domestic violence family law issues, including representing clients at domestic violence protection order hearings, drafting protective parenting plans and divorce filings, and advising clients who represent themselves.

In addition, she provides practitioner training and serves on a committee of legal aid partners in collaboration with the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office that helps bridge the gap between civil legal aid services to make them more accessible to domestic violence survivors.

Krebs was aware of the Law School's Loan Repayment Assistance Program and knew that Notre Dame supported work-life balance, family values, and those who serve in nonprofits. But in 2017, the LRAP program was limited to the 10 years immediately following graduation. She wrote to her former legal clinic professor, Bob Jones, associate dean for experiential programs, about making LRAP available for a full 10 years to any graduate who worked in eligible public interest work, regardless of how long ago they graduated. The Law School agreed and the program now supports alumni for whatever 10 years an eligible graduate works in public interest, not just the 10 years immediately following graduation.

"Having the LRAP program is wonderful and I am grateful," said Krebs. "It is a fantastic benefit and a great relief."

By alleviating her monthly student loan payment concerns, LRAP helps Krebs focus on the important work she is doing. "I did end up doing human rights law," she said. "Everyone has a right to be safe from harm and the right to parent safely. Those are both human rights."

She said most survivors of domestic violence have ongoing legal needs that continue for years. Protection orders need to be renewed and parenting plans require changes. Often the abuser will have more financial resources and misuse the court system, forcing survivors to return to court repeatedly to defend or enforce their protective orders.

Krebs plans to continue to guide her clients through the complex legal system and to continue offering whatever assistance she can to the survivors she serves.

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