



August 19, 2026

Dear Future Marquette Lawyer:

Welcome to a new academic year. Whether this marks your beginning as a Marquette law student or you have already earned a stripe or two, we are glad that you are here. This letter provides an update about the Law School. If that includes something of a backward look as well, please know that in our profession this is often the case.

People on the Journey with You. For a number of faculty and staff, this year in Eckstein Hall marks a new start. Their experiences, interests, and roles reflect a law school with rich traditions yet dynamic in its mission to serve our students, the community, and the wider world.

Aaron Hernandez joins us as associate professor of practice and director of the National Sports Law Institute. This native of El Paso, Texas, is one of ours: a Marquette lawyer. Since graduating in 2013, Professor Hernandez has held two positions of particular note. For six years, he was with the National Collegiate Athletic Association, helping direct its enforcement operations in football. In 2019, he joined Arizona State University, serving most recently as assistant dean and executive director of the Allan “Bud” Selig Sports Law and Business Program at ASU’s Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law. Professor Hernandez will team with his former teachers, Professors Matt Mitten and Paul Anderson, L’95, in advancing our sports law offerings, with Professor Anderson continuing to serve as director of the Sports Law Program.

José Girón, who joins us as assistant professor of law, is newly arrived from Washington, D.C., where he practiced for several years at Covington & Burling, in the firm’s Appellate and Supreme Court Practice. A graduate of Yale Law School, he previously served as a law clerk to the Hon. Stephanos Bibas of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. Professor Girón was born in Colombia, grew up in Florida, and attended the University of Southern California for college. His teaching and research interests include criminal law, criminal procedure, and policing. With this move to Milwaukee, Professor Girón demonstrates a confidence in us for which we are grateful.

Eric Liberatore joins us as assistant teaching professor and assistant director of student success, building upon a background in teaching and student development more generally. Having grown up in New England, Professor Liberatore attended law school first at the University of North Carolina and then at the University of Wisconsin. He distinguished himself at both schools in a number of ways, such as winning appellate advocacy awards. His subsequent practice included work at a nonprofit in Milwaukee and in the governor’s office in Madison. Professor Liberatore will collaborate particularly

with Anna Fodor, assistant dean of students, in our Academic Success Program, an important part of the first-year experience at Marquette Law School.

We have also expanded our Office of Public Service. Joshua Hernandez joins us as assistant director of the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinics (MVLCS). In a sense, he never left, although he graduated as a Marquette lawyer in our class of 2022. To be sure, he practiced for four years here in Milwaukee, in the Employee Benefits Practice at Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren. Yet throughout that time, Mr. Hernandez participated extensively as a volunteer in the Law School's pro bono and public service programs. This was no surprise, as such work already had become a *habit*: upon moving from Texas to Milwaukee for law school in 2019, Mr. Hernandez became an avid student volunteer in the MVLCS. Now, we welcome him back full-time and look forward to his helping us lead an expansion of these programs.

To round out this section: Next week, for a bit of late-breaking news, we will welcome Joe Samara, as our media and technology group's audiovisual technician. And on the "loss" side of the ledger, this semester will be Professor Ryan Scoville's final one with us, as he thereupon will join the faculty at the University of San Diego. Whether he is drawn by the relative proximity to his wife's native Japan or the region holds other attractions for this son of the American West, we shall miss Professor Scoville, for whose service on our faculty during the past decade and a half we are grateful. Finally, we are glad that, in retirement, Deborah Darin will continue to be associated with us, as associate law librarian emerita.

Pro Bono Recognition, the Marquette Mission, and Your Odyssey. Our planned expansion of the MVLCS arrives as their success earns extraordinary recognition and support. Their story could be told in a variety of forms, short or long. A medium-sized version may be instructive.

Part of the story behind the MVLCS involves the Catholic, Jesuit mission of Marquette University, of which the Law School has been fortunate to be an important part since 1908. The thinking of the Jesuits themselves has developed since the formation of the Society of Jesus in 1540 and even in recent decades, but suffice it here to say that it has increasingly emphasized a "preferential option for the poor" (a Jesuit phrase for considering social arrangements, public policy, and individual actions, first, from the standpoint of the poor and marginalized). Our Marquette president, Dr. Kimo Ah Yun, emphasized this even before he had the opportunity to meet Pope Leo XIV this past summer and subsequently to share with members of our community how his experiences in just the past couple of years as president have helped him further develop his thinking on the university's mission.

Another part of the history of the MVLCS involves the best traditions of the legal profession, including Marquette University Law School. For me, the exemplar remains my predecessor, the late Howard B. Eisenberg, who served as dean from 1995 until his death in 2002. Dean Eisenberg was an extraordinarily devoted pro bono lawyer, representing many incarcerated individuals in habeas and other proceedings even during (though apart from) his deanship. He regarded this work and his leadership of Marquette Law School more generally as altogether congruent with his own personal

faith, as he explained in a (locally) famous speech, “What’s a Nice Jewish Boy Like Me Doing in a Place Like This?” I once had the opportunity to represent Dean Eisenberg in a case where he was amicus curiae supporting an octogenarian Holocaust survivor in a lawsuit against the Federal Republic of Germany (the case resulted in a near miss, as the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act proved an insuperable obstacle for us). Dean Eisenberg inspired many of us, yet the traditions are broader.

The MVLCs, reflecting these traditions, began late in Dean Eisenberg’s tenure, though not as an administrative initiative. Rather, it was a group of women lawyers and law students who launched the first Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic in 2002. In the ensuing years, the Law School community more generally embraced the effort. Eschewing a “mandatory pro bono” program (a concept that Dean Eisenberg had found oxymoronic), the faculty in 2006 recommended developing the Office of Public Service, which (not coincidentally) we have housed in the Howard B. Eisenberg Suite since Ray and Kay Eckstein Hall opened sixteen years ago. Under the leadership of Angela Schultz, assistant dean for public service, along with Katie Mertz, L’11, as director of public service, the Law School has partnered with scores of legal services organizations and individual lawyers in the region—and, most essentially, with law students such as you—to help address the widespread need, especially in economically disadvantaged communities, for civil legal aid services. Indeed, Marquette’s work has become a national model.

You need not take my word for this. This fall, the Law School will receive the 2026 Pro Bono Publico Award from the American Bar Association at an event in Chicago. This is from the ABA’s announcement in June:

Marquette University Law School. The Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinics (MVLCs) have developed into a lifeline for unrepresented litigants facing civil legal challenges. From modest beginnings in 2002, handling just 106 client visits, the MVLCs have grown exponentially, recording 6,160 client visits in 2025 alone. Each year, over 250 volunteer attorneys and an equal number of law student volunteers donate their time to clients through the clinics. The MVLCs now operate across multiple locations, including the Milwaukee County Courthouse, the Milwaukee County Veterans Service Office, community-based social service agencies, a Mobile Legal Clinic van reaching underserved urban areas and virtual clinics on Zoom reaching across Wisconsin. The clinics provide legal guidance across a wide array of civil matters, including family law, child support, small claims, landlord-tenant disputes, evictions, debt resolution, probate, guardianships and immigration law. This expansive and adaptable service model helps those facing legal obstacles receive the assistance they need. In a state where only one legal aid attorney is available for every 4,300 individuals living at or below 125% of the federal poverty level, pro bono programs like the MVLCs both serve as a legal aid ecosystem and engage with legal aid providers, helping ensure that individuals seeking assistance do not fall through the cracks.

This is only the fourth time in more than forty years that a law school will receive this national award. In fact, the recognition belongs to the entire *Marquette University Law School community*—including students, faculty and staff, alumni, local firms, and the

bar more generally, who have provided the volunteer services that, more than anything else, *are* the MVLCs.

The efforts of so many volunteers and staff inspired the Ray and Kay Eckstein Charitable Trust this summer, even before news of the ABA award, to make a gift endowing our Office of Public Service and the MVLCs in particular. The Eckstein Trust donated \$3 million, and it has pledged an *additional* \$2 million if in the next year we raise \$2 million—whereupon the Law School will have an endowment of \$7 million for our public service work. It is almost twenty years since Ray and Kay Eckstein made their historic gift for the building, yet their legacy continues to support and guide Marquette Law School.

And this is part of my message to you and to our community. We welcome a new cohort of future Marquette lawyers each year and announce additions to our faculty and staff frequently. Recent beginning-of-semester letters, for example, have mentioned the appointment of Professors Zoë Robinson, Sarah Fox, Becca Donaldson, Karen Sandrik, Felicia Caponigri, and Jake Hamburger. The Law School, like the rest of Marquette, now also has the benefit of the leadership of Dr. Debbie Tahmassebi, the university's provost appointed by President Ah Yun this past spring. All of them and us come to a university and law school long-established and confident in its mission.

Yet the university and the Law School are constantly in formation. Like the understanding of the Catholic, Jesuit mission of the university more generally, our conception of the appropriate scope and ambitions of Marquette Law School evolves, *substantially guided by the ethics and affinities of those who form our community*. Among those are university leaders, including the president, provost, and dean; the faculty, in particular, who have devoted their professional lives to the school; the staff, of whom the same can be said and from whom, too, you can learn much; the community of Marquette lawyers; and the many members of the bench, bar, and visiting professoriate who share their energy, wisdom, and experience with the Law School. They also include *you*. When the cheer goes up, "We Are Marquette," this includes all of us, on our various interconnecting paths.

You may have seen Christopher Nolan's movie, *The Odyssey*, this summer. It has been acclaimed; it has been criticized. Having not seen it (partly because I read "the book"), I can sidestep that debate. Yet the epic's themes have long held a broad appeal, to prosaists such as me and to poets. Indeed, over the years, at one graduation ceremony or another, I have commended to new Marquette lawyers "Ithaka," by C. P. Cavafy, a relatively modern Greek poet, who uses Odysseus's journey home as a metaphor. In these early days of your own odyssey in the law, we encourage you to "hope your road is a long one/ full of adventure, full of discovery." We are very glad to begin this journey with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joseph D. Kearney".

Joseph D. Kearney
Dean and Professor of Law