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## Professors Britney Wilson and Claire Thomas Lead NYLS Clinics to Triumph

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## WE ARE NEW YORK'S LAW SCHOOL



## Professors Britney Wilson and Claire Thomas Lead NYLS Clinics to Triumph

Jennifer Bancamper • Published April 24, 2024

New York Law School (NYLS) is proud to recognize two impressive legal successes in championing equality for **Professor Britney Wilson** and the Civil Rights and Disability Justice Clinic, and **Professor Claire R. Thomas '11** and the Asylum Clinic.

### Civil Rights and Disability Justice Clinic Scores Win for Access-A-Ride Users

Professor Wilson has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Her efforts—alongside those of past and present Clinic students—were recently highlighted in a significant legal victory challenging the New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)'s policies regarding operations of their paratransit service, Access-A-Ride.

Last April, the Civil Rights and Disability Justice Clinic and their co-counsel at Vladeck, Raskin, & Clark, P.C. filed a lawsuit alleging that the MTA failed to provide Access-A-Ride users with comparable service to subway and bus commuters in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The case has survived a motion to dismiss, with a federal district court judge issuing an opinion ruling that the MTA may be violating the ADA as well as New York City Human Rights Law.

"Three classes of clinic students have worked on this case, and I'm incredibly proud of their efforts," said Professor Britney Wilson, Associate Professor of Law and Director of the Civil Rights and Disability Justice Clinic. "There is still a lot more to do, but this is an important first step."

"It has been a privilege to work alongside Access-A-Ride users to advocate for a better system," said Megan Johannesen '25, a law student intern in the Civil Rights and Disability Justice Clinic. "I have gotten to see the role that litigation can play in hopefully bringing about change, and it's great to know that the motion to dismiss decision could set an important legal precedent on transportation for people with disabilities."

The court also ordered that the case can proceed as a class action based on a stipulation to which all parties agreed.



Left photo from left to right: Brianna Kuriakose '24, Rebecca Bliss '25, Ashley Finney-Wortman '25, and Professor Britney Wilson; right photo: Megan Johannesen '24 and Rebecca Bliss '24

### Asylum Clinic Helps Ghanian Man Secure Asylum

Professor Thomas has demonstrated a deep commitment to justice through her work in asylum law. She and Asylum Clinic students recently succeeded in securing asylum for Mr. B, a gay man from Ghana fleeing persecution. Mr. B's journey to safety, fraught with various challenges, speaks to the need for legal representation in protecting the rights of asylum seekers.

Mr. B fled Ghana in late 2019 after a violent homophobic attack. He then encountered racism, xenophobia, and language justice issues during the time he spent detained in Mexico before seeking asylum in the United States. After arriving at the U.S. border amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. B was detained in a dormitory in Georgia with over 60 men, where he had no access to personal protective equipment. Through the efforts of the Asylum Clinic, Mr. B was released on bond and eventually traveled to New York, where he met with Professor Thomas.

Mr. B's case was postponed multiple times during the pandemic due to Immigration Court closures; however, years of diligent work by Professor Thomas and Asylum Clinic students proved fruitful when Mr. B was officially granted asylum earlier this year. Clinic students Yang Gao '22 and Aubrey Thompson '21 worked on Mr. B's case during the 2020–21 academic year, and law student interns Elizabeth Bellitto '24 and Jennifer Vega '24 represented Mr. B during his trial before the New York Immigration Court.

"It was so meaningful to begin my last semester of law school by helping Mr. B get his victory," said Bellitto. "I cannot wait to spend the rest of my life helping people like him who are in need."

Reflecting on the Asylum Clinic's achievement, Vega stated, "Working on Mr. B's case was one of the most impactful things I've done in higher education. It felt good to put work into actually helping someone and it felt even better to finally win his case."

"These victories highlight the role that NYLS plays in generating positive change throughout the broader community," says **Kim Hawkins**, Stephen J. Ellmann Dean for Clinical and Experiential Learning. "Through the expertise of faculty members like Professor Wilson and Professor Thomas and the dedication of driven law students, NYLS continues to champion justice, equality, and the rule of law."



*Jennifer Vega '24, Elizabeth Bellitto '24, Mr. B, and Professor Claire R. Thomas '11*

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