

# Law School Launches Nation's First Forensic Defense Clinic

University of Maryland, Baltimore : 5-6 minutes

Forensic evidence has become a fixture in today's criminal cases. Think fingerprints, ballistics, and DNA, as well as novel technologies and surveillance tools.



Professors Molly Ryan (far left) and Maneka Sinha (far right) are shown with the first cohort of Forensic Defense Clinic students at Maryland Carey Law.

To prepare students for this modern reality, the [University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law](#) has launched the first law school defense clinic in the nation specifically focused on forensic evidence. Led by two professors — **Maneka Sinha, JD**, a leading expert in the field, and **Molly Ryan, JD**, a former public defender with extensive forensic litigation experience — the Forensic Defense Clinic held its first meeting in late August.

Student Faith Kim, Class of 2025 is enthusiastic about joining the inaugural cohort.

"I was thrilled to see this clinic being offered for the first time because forensic evidence has become an essential part of criminal law," said Kim, who spent last summer working at the Maryland Office of the Attorney General. "I'm most excited to see some of the newer types of forensic evidence and the role they play in the criminal legal system."

Kim and peers will have a two-pronged experience in the 6-credit clinic. The practicum component enables students to work on real cases involving forensic evidence through the Maryland Office of the Public Defender (OPD). Participants also will take Sinha's seminar, Advanced Evidence: Forensic Science in Criminal Cases, which offers an intensive survey of forensic evidence and explores legal

principles governing and regulating the use of forensic evidence in criminal cases, with a particular focus on admissibility.

OPD is currently handling post-conviction cases resulting from the Maryland Supreme Court's 2023 landmark ruling in *Abruquah v. State*, limiting the admissibility of certain firearms analysis evidence in Maryland. Clinic students this semester will assist on some of those cases under the supervision of Sinha and Ryan, who previously worked as an assistant public defender in the office. The 2023 ruling made testimony claiming that a certain bullet matched to a certain gun inadmissible, citing a lack of reliability in the procedures used to determine the match. Maryland is the first state in the nation to restrict on a statewide level the use of this kind of forensic evidence.

Jeffrey Gilleran, chief attorney of OPD's Forensics Division, is excited about the partnership, which builds on a longstanding relationship between the law school and OPD.

"Training future lawyers in forensic litigation is critical. The nature of criminal prosecutions has changed dramatically over the last several years, and most serious criminal cases now involve multiple forensic fields," Gilleran said. "I applaud the law school's forward thinking in establishing this clinic. We look forward to working with the students."

As part of the partnership, Gilleran, a renowned forensic litigator, also will present a guest lecture in the clinic.

The OPD cases align with the clinic's goal to "examine and interrogate the contribution of forensic methods to intersectional inequality and injustice in the criminal legal and related systems." Forensic evidence, Sinha explained, enables the disproportionate criminalization of people of color and members of other marginalized communities.

The clinic also is affiliated with Maryland Carey Law's Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law, which launched last year.

"The Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law is proud to partner with our pathbreaking Forensic Defense Clinic," said **Michael Pinard, JD**, the center's faculty director. "The clinic's work aligns with the center's mission to work collaboratively to address systems of racial and intersectional oppression."

Together, Sinha and Ryan make a powerhouse team.

Ryan brings deep experience from her extensive litigation of novel and complex forensic issues involving firearms comparisons and DNA analysis to the new clinic.

Sinha is a groundbreaking scholar interrogating the admissibility of forensic evidence. She is the author of "The Automated Fourth Amendment" in the *Emory Law Journal*, "Radically Reimagining Forensic Evidence" in the *Alabama Law Review*, and "Junk Science at Sentencing," in the *George Washington Law Review*,

Before joining the law school to relaunch the Criminal Defense Clinic in 2019, Sinha spent 10 years at the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia. There, she served as senior advisor to the agency's director on forensic science issues and represented indigent clients charged with the most serious crimes in Washington, including complex homicides and sexual assaults.

In May, Sinha received the Joel R. Reidenberg Award for Outstanding Scholarship by a Junior Scholar at the Privacy Law Scholars Conference at the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington. This summer, she was recognized for excellence in scholarship and teaching with a promotion to professor of law at Maryland Carey Law.