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Summer Legal Fellows Reflection
Dr. Leonard Cutler

“Always go with the choice that scares you the most, because that’s the one that is going to help you grow” (Myss, Caroline). In college, we as students are forced to make decisions that will ultimately shape our futures. We are given opportunities by our peers, professors, and university to better ourselves and put ourselves out of our comfort box. This summer, I was given an opportunity that left an everlasting effect on me and my future. I spent my summer as a Summer Legal Fellow at Touro Law Center, Senior Citizens Law Program, located in Central Islip, New York.

The Summer Legal Fellows program gave me an experience that many other undergraduate students do not get. I had the opportunity to work and learn from experienced attorneys every day. I also frequently was in contact with clients at the clinic and attended court hearing weekly. Before arriving at Touro I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in law, however following this program, I knew for sure that it was everything I wanted for my future.

On my first day, I met with Clinical Program director, Leif Rubinstein. He very loosely explained the dynamic of the clinical programs and left me on my own to explore the clinical department. Along with Keshawn Langhorn, we took it upon ourselves to introduce ourselves to the attorneys on staff in the office. After meeting and talking to many clinical attorneys, we found to connect best with the Senior Citizens Law Program attorneys, AveMaria Thompson and Denise Doty. This clinical program was for individuals over the age of 60 living in Suffolk County, New York. The program offered pro bono legal services. The Senior Citizens Program

specialized in many services however, did not intake any issue regarding criminal acts, wills, and estate planning.

We were immediately assigned valuable and challenging legal work. My responsibilities included:

1. Performing intakes on potential clients and learning their legal issues
2. Writing discovery demands
3. Attending court hearings with AveMaria Thompson
4. Preparing trial questions for AveMaria's cases
5. Performing Western Law research for trials

The client intakes presented challenges because I was forced to think and respond quickly and efficiently. Often, the potential clients were under distress and a lot of pressure. I was obligated to fill out a form on each new client containing their demographical information, income, and their legal issue. A large sum of the legal issues were concerning Medicaid, landlord/tenant, and debt crisis. I believe this responsibility was one that really taught me how to deal with others and grow socially as a person.

On multiple occasions, Keshawn and I worked together on writing discovery demands. AveMaria gave us the tools and information on each case and assigned us this task. One particular case, we were given very little guidance and were forced to write a "Notice to Produce" to the opposing attorney. We both wrote up the letter and presented it to AveMaria. She then sat down with us and taught us how to correct any mistakes and why they were incorrect. She worked hard to assure that we understood what was wrong and how to do well

in the future. Thus, we not only learned how to write up a discovery demand but we also worked as a focused team.

In addition, I had the opportunity to follow alongside numerous cases. Each week, Keshawn and I attended at least one court hearing of a client. These hearings were often in the landlord/tenant court. I was able to meet and speak with the client AveMaria represented and become familiar with court room procedure. Frequently, the cases were settled with a stipulation. The two sides would discuss amongst themselves a solution so that the case did not advance to a trial. In the event that they went as far as trial, I was able to prepare questions to be asked of the client or witnesses on the stand. This especially was important to me because I was able to see my work come to life in the court room. AveMaria used my questions and found them to be valuable always. I look forward to the time when I am permitted to question an individual in a trial setting.

Lastly, I was taught how to perform Western Law research. AveMaria Thompson assigned me the task to research a case related to one we were working on. Western Law research will be extremely useful to me when I attend law school. Very few undergraduate students have the opportunity to learn this form of research before attending law school. I am excited to know I will be ahead of others in my law schools class.

Therefore, this program as intense and “scary” as it was, allowed me to grow exponentially. I will have an advantage over those going to law school, thanks to the guidance of AveMaria and the opportunity from Dr. Cutler. I believe in this program and will always speak upon the honor it was to be a Summer Legal Fellow.

