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The generous fellowship I received from the Liman Program allowed me to pursue a ten-week internship at the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) in New York City this past summer. Working at CCA taught me a great deal about how the criminal justice system actually works and affects defendants, defendants' families, and their communities. I had so many unforgettable experiences helping to interview the families of defendants in potential federal death penalty cases. I also learned a significant amount about the process of sentencing mitigation from conducting research into certain mitigation themes, reviewing records and subpoenaed material, and from meeting lawyers involved in the cases. Throughout the course of the summer, I developed a great sense of admiration for the individuals I worked with, most of whom were not lawyers but interacted with the law on a daily basis. Although dealing with potential death penalty cases was at times emotionally tiring, I was deeply encouraged by the hope and commitment I witnessed in my colleagues at CCA who had been working on death penalty cases for years and were very dedicated to the organization's mission.

CCA is a New York-based nonprofit organization with offices in Syracuse, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. I worked at its Manhattan office. CCA offers a wide range of different programs to serve community members, including a drug treatment program for women offenders also located in the Manhattan office. I worked specifically in CCA's sentencing mitigation division, focusing mainly on death penalty mitigation. I was the only intern working in that division. At the moment, New York State is not imposing

sentences involving capital punishment, so this summer I worked solely on federal death penalty cases.

The sentencing mitigation specialists at CCA work with the lawyers of clients charged in potential death penalty cases. Through extensive investigations into the backgrounds of clients, interviews with relevant individuals and family members, and comprehensive criminological and academic research, CCA's mitigation specialists develop a sentencing mitigation strategy to argue against execution in the event that a client is convicted. CCA often gets involved in cases long before they even go to trial, compiling mitigation evidence to argue that certain cases should not be authorized as potential death penalty cases by the federal government.

If a case is authorized as a potential death penalty case, CCA then works with the client's lawyers to collect mitigation evidence for the penalty phase of the trial. Mitigation evidence can take many different forms. For example, a defendant's experience of child abuse, mental illness, parental neglect, or some other trauma might be used as a mitigating factor; a defendant's medical records might then be offered as evidence that the defendant experienced such trauma.

This summer I had the opportunity to work on a number of different cases and thus was involved in many different stages of the mitigation process. Some of the most important tasks I engaged in included conducting academic research into certain mitigation factors—such as childhood abuse or mental illness—which was then used in a number of pre-authorization reports. CCA uses evidence from peer-reviewed journals and other prominent sources to explain why certain types of trauma might be considered mitigating factors.

I also contacted schools, hospitals, and other organizations to find records that could tell us more about a client's life. From these records, my colleagues and I could discover more potential mitigating factors. Sometimes I would even request the medical records of a defendant's family member, if that family member had given us official permission to do so, in order to learn more about the environment the defendant lived in, or to better establish what the consequences of the defendant's execution might be on his family members. At the same time, I also reviewed subpoenaed material to see if there were relevant documents that related to certain mitigation themes. Once I even accompanied a colleague to a courthouse to search through stacks of records that we could not bring out of the building.

Another activity I engaged in was learning how to use a computer program that allowed me to put together timelines of the critical events that had occurred in a client's life. I then used information we had gathered to create a number of timelines that helped my colleagues and the lawyers of clients understand the progression of events in their clients' lives.

One more aspect of the internship that I found really interesting was being invited to sit in on two meetings with entire case teams—lawyers, investigators, and paralegals, in addition to CCA's mitigation specialists—as they reviewed the progress of all the team members on the case. These meetings allowed me to see the different ways in which defense teams approach the sentencing phase of death penalty trials.

But of all the myriad tasks I completed at CCA this summer, by far the most interesting—and the most emotionally difficult—was taking part in interviews with the family members of the defendants in potential death penalty cases. Prior to working at CCA, I had often thought about death penalty cases solely in terms of the murdered victim, the victim's family, and the alleged perpetrator. But my interviews reminded me that death penalty cases can also affect the family members of the alleged perpetrators as well. Indeed, the spouses, children, and other relatives that I met were often in such anguish that they could not even bring themselves to consider what would happen if their family member were to be executed. These interviews were also interesting for me because I was able to accompany my colleagues out into the field and visit the poverty-stricken neighborhoods where many of the defendants we worked with lived or grew up. Each time we visited, I couldn't help thinking to myself, *if I had grown up here, I probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to study at Princeton today*. It was a very sobering thought.

These interviews were by far the most memorable experiences I had while working at CCA. It's so hard to pick just one moment to write about, but I was very moved by the experience of listening to the young daughter of a client read one of her favorite books aloud. I will never forget her adorable smiles and her intelligence—she was a clear reminder to me of the real people that CCA works for. She also helped me understand that often, when we impose a sentence of capital punishment, we are not just punishing murderers. We are punishing their innocent children as well.

Working at CCA certainly changed the way I think about the justice system and capital punishment specifically. Although I have always opposed the death penalty, working with the families of individuals potentially facing the death penalty reminded me that capital punishment has collateral effects. Working at CCA has also helped me decide that I want to continue to study criminal justice issues. This summer, while searching through clients' records, I noticed that many individuals now charged in death penalty cases started their criminal careers by committing much more minor crimes as teenagers. I couldn't help wondering whether society could have done something after those teenagers were arrested for the first time which would have steered them toward a more positive path so that they would not be facing the death penalty today. This observation has inspired my senior thesis in which I will examine the sentencing procedures and rehabilitation programs currently offered to juvenile offenders in New Jersey. I will consider whether we can make these procedures and programs more effective to better prevent future crime.

Looking ahead, working at CCA has also encouraged my own ambitions to complete more criminal justice-related work in the future. At the moment I am applying to graduate school to study criminology and I hope to eventually earn a PhD in this field. I would like one day to become a policy advisor on criminal justice issues because I believe this is a field in which critical reforms need to be made.