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Liman Summer Fellowship Final Report

As a 2017 Liman Summer Fellow, I worked at the Public Defender Association in Seattle, Washington. The Public Defender Association (PDA) is a nonprofit that works on justice system reform and public health issues. Among many other projects, they run Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), a pre-booking diversion program that directs people with behavioral health issues to services rather than jail, and the Washington chapter of VOCAL, a direct-organizing group for people affected by mass incarceration and related issues.

I spent most of my ten-week internship researching trespass policy in Kent and Auburn, two suburbs of Seattle. Coincidentally, my supervisor, attorney Corey Guilmette, is an Arthur Liman Public Interest Fellow! His fellowship work focuses on these trespass admonishments, which allow police to routinely exercise unilateral authority to ban individuals from public and private spaces, from public parks to restaurants to apartment complexes. These bans can be issued for any reason and can be imposed for indefinite periods. The trespassed individual has no right of appeal, and the complete discretion granted to law enforcement officers means that the bans end up limiting the mobility of certain groups—especially targeting Black individuals and the homeless.

Corey had obtained numerous public records about the use of trespass in Kent and Auburn. I analyzed these spreadsheets to determine patterns in the data and created materials including write-ups, figures, and an infographic that could be presented to public officials or members of the media interested in learning about this issue. As

expected, Black and/or unhoused individuals were disproportionately trespassed compared to their white and/or housed counterparts. We also conducted in-person field research: one week, we drove down to Auburn, visited businesses and facilities that had used trespass bans within our sample period, and interviewed employees to determine how they view both trespass bans and the issues that cause them to call the police in the first place. This experience taught me a lot about how to approach a brand new (to me) issue from multiple angles and think through possibilities for reform.

I also had the opportunity to support PDA's public health work, specifically their strong advocacy for safe consumption sites (SCS). The Seattle region is in the middle of a devastating heroin and opioid addiction epidemic: approximately every 36 hours, someone in King County dies from heroin/opiates. Safe consumption sites would save lives by providing clean spaces for people to use drugs with medical attention nearby and connect to treatment when they are ready. I compiled articles, quotes, and statistical evidence for the Yes to SCS campaign and worked on an advocacy mailing campaign throughout my ten weeks.

In addition to these two major projects, I gained a better understanding of direct legal services work by watching Corey take a client through the LEAD program. I conducted research to help PDA attorneys problem-solve with the Seattle Parks Department on how to make their facilities accessible to all patrons, including unhoused individuals who were using their community center and park bathrooms to bathe. Finally, it was fascinating to see PDA Director Lisa Daugaard strategize about how to deal with all the different players and moving parts involved in PDA's Hardest to House effort, which aims to bring resources and attention to the specific issues faced by people who are

active drug users or have criminal records. This showed me how to think tactically and realistically, even and especially when trying to achieve idealistic goals. I attended and gave public comment at several city and county council meetings to advocate for allocating funding for this population. Just before I returned to Princeton, the Seattle City Council unanimously passed the Fair Chance Housing Ordinance, which will prevent landlords from discriminating against potential tenants who have criminal records. This was an incredibly exciting development, and one that I hope foreshadows more truly progressive change to come.

I am deeply grateful to the Liman program for supporting me this summer and to PDA for welcoming me. I leave this internship experience more convinced than ever that I want to devote my career to public service, particularly in the area of justice system reform. It was wonderful to learn from people who are so passionate about the same issues. As someone who was born and raised in Seattle, it meant a lot to me to use this time to explore critical issues in my own community, and I fully intend to move home eventually to contribute my energy to achieving social justice in my city.