

As a 2019 Liman Fellow, I interned in the Consumer Advocacy and Response Division (CARD) of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. The experience not only affirmed my decision to pursue a career in public interest law, but also exposed me to new and exciting models of what such a career might look like. I'm incredibly grateful to the Liman program for this opportunity.

Founded in 2016 by current Attorney General Maura Healey, CARD responds to a range of consumer complaints submitted by Massachusetts residents, handling everything from defective automobiles to imminent foreclosures. Through direct advocacy and communication, the division attempts to reach resolutions between businesses and consumers outside of the courtroom. It also monitors trends and patterns in complaints in order to assist its partner unit, the Consumer Protection Division (CPD), in large-scale litigation efforts. For example, if CARD notes a wave of complaints against the same company and related to the same practice, it may flag that pattern for CPD to take further legal action.

I was part of the Utilities team within CARD: my main responsibility was to handle complaints related to contractors, cell phone providers, and electric/gas companies. After being assigned to a consumer's complaint, I would research the relevant policies and regulations to determine if the alleged business practices were legal. I would then reach out to the consumer, discuss their complaint, and identify a possible resolution. After obtaining permission from the consumer, I would finally reach out to the business, explain their customer's concerns, and

attempt to solve the problem. This work provided good practice for both my research and communication skills. The range of issues also led me to a better understanding of many aspects of consumer law: I handled complaints ranging from a mischarged phone bill to an imminent water shut-off faced by a consumer with severe medical needs.

In addition to casework, I created an Excel model to track and categorize robo-calls and spam calls reported by consumers. The model will allow our office to identify the most common strategies and ‘campaigns’ used by these illegal callers over time, which will in turn help us to understand the populations they target. I also helped the office to track the work of Local Consumer Programs (LCPs) -- branch organizations which handle certain, locally-based complaints -- to ensure that they met the main office’s standards. This work was ideal for me as a history major, because it involved sifting through large amounts of data to identify key patterns.

Beyond the opportunity to build concrete skills, however, this job was extremely meaningful to me because it necessitated listening carefully to the stories of residents throughout the state of Massachusetts. Working on cases, shadowing the consumer complaint hotline, and even answering the central switchboard, I had the humbling opportunity to hear from hundreds of people I would never otherwise have met about their experiences and the challenges they were facing. These moments of vulnerability, connection, and mutual effort towards a solution were powerful. One of my favorite experiences on the job was receiving a sincere note of thanks from a veteran after successfully resolving an issue with a contractor who had failed to complete a scheduled project. Working in consumer law also reinforced to me the intersectionality of many issues within the legal system – residents vulnerable to exploitation by businesses may too face a

variety of other violations (in labor rights and civil rights, for example). The ideal consumer advocacy would involve empowering and educating individuals on a range of their legal rights, as well as identifying repeated violations by businesses that must be addressed through changes in regulations.

I also found it immensely interesting to work in a large legal organization with many different areas of focus. On a practical and intellectual level, this allowed me to learn about diverse types of public interest law, from health care to civil rights. For example, although my own work was with consumers, I was able to meet with one of the attorneys involved in the Massachusetts lawsuit against Purdue Pharma for its role in aggressively marketing opioids and contributing to our current crisis. It was extremely interesting to hear her speak candidly about the challenges involved in this type of litigation. The interns were also able to attend presentations from the six bureaus and learn about their role in advancing the Attorney General's priorities; at the end of the program, we even had a Q&A session with the Attorney General herself. More fundamentally, the office's range of focus allows it to build teams that can effectively tackle issues with many inextricable components. For example, I attended a group meeting on housing rights which was made up of lawyers from Consumer Advocacy, Civil Rights, the Abandoned Housing Unit, and Environmental Protection. The size of the office makes it capable of responding to the tangled nature of many injustices.

Throughout the summer, again and again, I saw ways in which the law can be used to make positive and lasting change in the lives of Massachusetts residents -- whether that change is as minute as being reimbursed for a gift card after a business closes, or as monumental as

assistance on a crucial home loan modification application. I am indebted to the Liman Program, as well as my amazing supervisors, coworkers, and fellow interns, for these foundational ten weeks.