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This summer, I spent twelve weeks at the Public Defender Service of the District of Columbia (PDS) as an intern investigator. PDS is a federally-funded independent legal organization that provides legal aid to indigent defendants in criminal, juvenile, appellate, and parole proceedings. While PDS is only authorized to represent up to 60% of all criminal defendants in trial in Washington, D.C. and usually only handles appellate litigation generated from PDS cases, the organization represents nearly every single individual sentenced under the D.C. Code that is facing a parole revocation before the United States Parole Commission, granted that there are no conflicts of interest. PDS also has a Community Defender Division that represents youth at institutional disciplinary hearings and provides a Community Reentry Program that addresses the specific needs of previously incarcerated individuals transitioning back to life in the community.

Intern investigators at PDS are generally sorted into either the Trial or Parole divisions and assigned one partner to work with for the entire summer. Due to some internal shuffling, I had the opportunity to work in Trial for seven weeks and in Parole for four. Through that combination of the two divisions I

got to do everything from watching trials to attending parole revocation hearings, canvassing crime scenes for witnesses to interviewing complaining witnesses, listening to police radio calls to listening to inmate jail calls. I visited the D.C. jail, the D.C. Superior Court, and the Metropolitan Police Department more times than I can count. Occasionally, my attorneys asked me to write memos detailing the specifics of my canvassing experiences and interviews, but I would definitely not consider my internship a desk job. Three days out of five were spent in the community trying to track down people relevant to my cases.

In the trial division, I worked with two different attorneys on murder, aggravated assault, assault with intent to kill (AWIK), and assault with a deadly weapon (ADW) cases. One of the attorneys was a supervisor and handled a lot of the tougher, older cases. As a result, I ended up working on a murder case from a little over five years ago. In one day, my partner and I knocked on the doors of over 60 apartments around the area where the murder had occurred trying to find people who remembered the incident in question. Another time, I ended up on a case from the late 1980s, trying to track down witnesses who had moved away – or even died – to ask them about an incident that had happened over twenty years ago. One of the witnesses I

spoke to put it best when she irritably asked me how I could possibly ask her to recall specific details about something that took place before I was even born.

The attorneys in the parole division usually dealt with a lot of technical parole violations such as clients missing meetings with their parole officers or failing their urine tests. Sometimes there would be law violations as well, in which case investigations would proceed in much the same manner as they did in trial. Law violations could be as simple as a mild altercation between partners that a neighbor reported to the police or as complicated as alleged threats made against transgender women while brandishing a butcher's knife. Due to the short turn-around period for parole hearings, however, I never had to struggle with tracking down witnesses from years ago the way I had had to do in trial.

If I were to pick one most memorable moment from the summer, though, it would not be regarding any case that I had worked on. Sometime in the middle of the summer when my caseload was a little lower than usual, I went over to the courthouse to watch closing arguments for a murder case that was going on at the time. It was a codefendant case that had not been severed so a PDS attorney was representing one codefendant while a CJA attorney, a private attorney who is paid under the Criminal Liman/Summer Fellows/Summer 2014 Reports/11 4 14

Justice Act, was representing the other codefendant. The Assistant U.S. Attorney (AUSA) in the case had done such an absolutely phenomenal job of incorporating a PowerPoint, 911 calls, and surveillance footage into an emotionally stirring closing argument that I was doubtful that the defense attorneys could salvage the situation at all. By the end of the PDS attorney's closing argument, however, I was fully confident that the PDS client was innocent. By the end of the CJA attorney's closing argument, I was sure that his client was not.

When the PDS attorney spoke, his voice resounded with conviction and fortitude. He knew his client was innocent; in fact, everyone knew his client was innocent. Why did the jury need to deliberate at all? The PDS attorney was clear and precise. He knew the facts of the case backwards and forwards. He did not try to take down the AUSA's entire case but focused instead on specific weak spots that could provide the reasonable doubt he needed to win an acquittal. It would be a cliché to say that I waited eagerly for his every word or that I was sitting on the edge of my seat, but the fact of the matter is that I knew, even as he spoke, that I was listening to the best example of a "zealous defense" that I had ever heard in my life. The CJA attorney was his exact opposite.

The CJA attorney was nervous and flustered and he fumbled clumsily through the packet of notes in his hands as he spoke. It was clear that he had nothing substantive to say when he turned to critiquing the AUSA's presentation of her closing instead of evaluating the facts. His closing was barely half as long as that of the PDS attorney.

When I checked back on the status of this case a few days after the jury started deliberating, I found that while the CJA client and the PDS client had both been charged with the same crimes, including AWIK, ADW, carrying a pistol without a license, and tampering with evidence, the PDS client had been acquitted of all the major charges and convicted only of carrying a pistol and tampering with evidence while the CJA client had been found guilty on all charges.

I have heard the term "zealous defense" or "zealous representation" tossed around casually in circles of defense attorneys, but this summer was really the first time that I saw for myself how much of an impact such zealous legal defense can have on real people. It was really inspiring to see a federally-paid public defender representing his average run-of-the-mill client as if he were making six figures a year representing the children of millionaires. Seeing the stark contrast between the attorneys was like having my future options as a public defender

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placed before me: I could be like any old defense attorney who does the bare minimum to get through a case and get paid or I could be a public defender who really believes in the injustice and bias inherent in the system and fight fiercely for my clients every single time. The choice is clear to me.

Although I am only a junior in college, I am eagerly waiting for the day when I will be able to put what I learned this summer to use. I hope to one day return to PDS and continue to uphold their tradition of zealously defending their clients before the law.

I am incredibly thankful for all the monetary support that the Liman program provided me with this summer. I really could not have participated in this internship at PDS without it. I really do not think there is anything else the Liman program could have done to better support me. I am really thankful for this opportunity that I received.