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Receiving a Wellman Hill Political Science Grant gave me the opportunity to intern at the Maryland Office of the Attorney General this summer. The office placed me in the Consumer Protection Division, tasked with upholding and enforcing Maryland consumer protection laws. I worked as a mediator in the Mediation Unit, aiding in the resolution of disputes between consumers and businesses.

The first week of my internship was difficult, but rewarding. On the first day, I was given several cases, even though I still had to learn about Maryland consumer protection laws. By assigning me cases, my supervisor was treating me as if I were an experienced mediator. Yet I lacked confidence that I had the ability to mediate. I decided the best way to learn was to start work on my first cases. I would read through consumer's written complaints. Then, my supervisor had me brief her on the cases. We would discuss the applicable consumer law and determine the best course of action. After the briefing, I was expected to contact the consumer, determine what the consumer wished to gain out of mediation, and ask clarifying questions. Through written and phone correspondence, I would set up a line of communication for the business and consumer to discuss their demands and determine their own solution.

Many consumers that file complaints to the Consumer Protection Division feel like doing so is their last resort. When all other attempts to resolve their complaints to the business fail, they turn to mediation rather than to litigation. Mediators act as neutral parties. We guide and aid the opposing parties to engage in productive, civil conversation. Although mediators do not possess

enforcement powers, their neutrality can serve as a benefit. Our impartiality makes both parties feel that they hold equal bargaining power in the discussion. The mediators attempt to get the consumer and the business to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

During my internship, I had the opportunity to sit in on an arbitration meeting. The Maryland Office of the Attorney General offers a free arbitration service for consumers and businesses who do not wish to continue discussions through mediation. Arbitration is another form of alternative dispute resolution. In arbitration, the opposing parties bring their ongoing dispute to a neutral third party (an arbitrator). The arbitrator listens to the parties' evidence and testimonies and makes a binding decision. Before working as a mediator, I thought that litigation was the most effective way to resolve business disputes. However, I learned that arbitration is speedy, cost-effective alternative to litigation.

My summer internship provided me with valuable life lessons and skills that will aid me in my professional career. Active listening is key to effective advocacy. While mediators serve as neutral parties, they do relay messages from the consumer to the businesses. Although the office would receive written complaints, sometimes concerns or desires of the consumer were not relayed. Through phone calls, I gathered key details from the consumer on the result they wished to see from mediation. Some conversations seemed tangential to the topic at hand; however, they ended up being useful to understanding what the consumer desired from the process. I made sure that those desires were properly communicated during my interactions with businesses. Attention to detail and active listening can help you to effectively address your clients' concerns. During this internship, I learned that failures are teaching moments. Some of the mediation cases that I worked on did not end in a positive resolution. However, each unsuccessful mediation led me to reflect and adapt my approach to a mediation. The new knowledge gained made mediation an

easier process for me to navigate. One will not always be successful in their career endeavors. Use every failure as a learning opportunity to improve and refine one's career skills.

The time I spent this summer would not have been possible without the Wellman Hill grant. Observing volunteer mediators' dedicating their time to aid consumers strengthened my interest in public service. Mediation can be a long and difficult process. However, mediators truly are an asset to the community by providing an alternative to litigation. There are other ways outside of the court to resolve civil disputes. Without the Wellman Hill committee's and Judge Hill's generous support, this amazing internship would not have been possible.