

## Wellman Hill Summer 2020 Reflection

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This summer I had the opportunity to work as a bankruptcy law clerk for the Legal Aid Society in Columbus, Ohio for the second summer in a row. I am incredibly grateful for the Wellman Hill Grant because it enabled me to dedicate myself fully to my position at Legal Aid without having to worry about financial considerations. Going into my second summer at Legal Aid, I knew that I would enjoy my time there as last year's experience had already solidified my desire to pursue a career in public interest law.

Due to COVID-19, this summer was, of course, quite different: All Legal Aid employees were working virtually which presented its own unique set of challenges. Working virtually meant that I spoke with my manager via phone only once a week, which was a very different experience from the prior summer, when I would see and speak with my supervisors and the other interns multiple times every day. I appreciated the opportunity to work virtually because it helped me to better anticipate the needs of the supervising attorneys, to communicate in a range of ways and to keep detailed records of every case that I worked on.

I worked mainly as a clerk with individuals looking to file Chapter 7 bankruptcy or going through the Bankruptcy Bypass program, which is meant to help people on social security or disability insurance or individuals who are permanently unable to work to avoid filing bankruptcy due to their uncollectible status. The majority of my work focused on helping these clients collect the needed documents, including their credit reports, paystubs, and various forms of identification. My favorite part of working as a law clerk is the fact that I get much more time than the attorneys to speak to and assist the various clients that we worked with: it allowed me to develop relationships with the clients and taught me the significance of personal connections and empathy.

This summer presented a very unique situation for clients of Legal Aid: because of the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequential serious financial needs of so many people, more individuals than ever before had turned to Legal Aid for free and reduced-priced Legal Services. For the duration of the pandemic, Legal Aid even created a special taskforce designed to connect individuals with community resources that could provide them financial, emotional, and physical resources. As a result, the majority of my clients were simultaneously going through other legal cases in other departments in addition to the ones within the bankruptcy department; this summer was incredibly busy not just for me and the other law clerks at Legal Aid but also the attorneys who worked very hard to meet the needs of more than 50 clients at a time.

This summer at Legal Aid strengthened my commitment to law even more than the previous summer's experience. I saw the value of the law in helping people manage difficult situations, and the value of having empathy within legal processes. I am grateful to the Wellman Hill selection committee for allowing me to take this amazing opportunity once again to give back to my community.