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Through the Wellman Hill Political Science Internship Grant Program, I had the privilege of interning in the office of Patrick E. Swanson, District Attorney of Chautauqua County, New York. As the top law enforcement official in the county, the District Attorney is responsible for providing fair, efficient, effective prosecution on behalf of the public. In addition to prosecuting all criminal cases in County Court and County Supreme Court, the District Attorney handles proceedings in the Town, Village, and City courts during scheduled calendar calls.

The first day was a whirlwind. At nine o'clock, conferences began in the chamber of the County Court Judge, with morning proceedings following promptly at ten. Returning to the office, it was time to decipher the attorneys' shorthand notes from court, update the case management system to reflect the morning's happenings, and return the files to their appropriate locations. After lunch, I departed for the afternoon calendar call in Jamestown City Court, which hears cases ranging from traffic infractions to felonies. By five o'clock, it was clear that the next three months would be equally active and absorbing.

Much of my time was spent developing a working knowledge of New York State's Penal Law (PL), Vehicle and Traffic Law (VTL), and Criminal Procedure Law (CPL), closing a backlog of files in need of final case dispositions. Throughout the twelve weeks, I read, documented, and sent over eighteen thousand files to records management, overhauling the in-office filing system. Each file was its own puzzle; while some could be closed in under a minute, others required extensive examination of the law, consultation with an attorney, and inquiry with the appropriate court.

When not sitting behind an Assistant District Attorney in court or navigating the labyrinth of files, I gained exposure to Westlaw and LexisNexis by conducting legal research on case-specific projects, contributed to trial preparation, and helped review the office's budget presentations. Preparing calendars, discovery, and Freedom of Information Act requests were opportunities to understand the technical side of law, while observing consultations with the Victim Assistance Program, meeting with law enforcement, and reviewing real evidence gave sobering context for my work.

From the outside, it is easy to criticize public servants as lazy or inept. Nevertheless, having the chance to work "in the trenches" this summer, I confirmed my suspicion that people choose public service because it truly serves a meaningful, higher good. Despite paperwork, daily hassles, and tight budgets, public servants wake up in the morning with the desire to make the world a better place one step—or case file—at a time.

Meaningful experiences beget enthusiasm and determination. Working for the people of Chautauqua County left me with an eagerness to attend law school and an invigorated dedication to public service. I am indebted to the Wellman Hill Grant Program for the opportunities this summer afforded, and I commend Ms. Hill for her exemplary vision and generosity.