

King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office

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Harvard Club of Seattle

I served as a Legal Extern for the Homicide and Violent Crimes Unit of the Criminal Division of the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (in Seattle, Washington). I worked on a variety of felony cases, including robberies, assaults, homicides, and rapes. I assisted several attorneys in all stages of the process, from case discovery to pre-trial preparation to the trial itself. Most of my time was spent performing the following tasks:

First, I combed through jail tapes (audio recordings of defendants making calls from the jail telephone). The goal was to catch the defendant making self-incriminating statements about himself or his co-defendants. I would listen to each call, identify pertinent conversations, and extract clips for further review. I performed a similar task with surveillance videos and witness statements, hoping to find discrepancies or anything that the attorneys may have missed during their reviews of the material.

Second, I produced visual exhibits for presentation during trial. Having worked as a geospatial intelligence analyst last summer, I was able to utilize my cartographic skills in order to make animated maps and other diagrams depicting crime scenes, escape routes, vantage points, etc. Sometimes I would even be sent on scene visits, where I would travel to a crime scene and take photos. During the trial itself, I sat at the prosecutor's table in order to facilitate transitions between these exhibits.

Third, I assembled trial notebooks consisting of all the documents that go into the case. Even though this required a lot of time in the copying room, I enjoyed the task nonetheless

because it allowed me to see exactly how all the different elements combine to make a successful prosecution. I also performed some redactions on notebooks being sent to the defense.

Fourth, I wrote several case prep sheets and a few trial memoranda. Trial memos are official legal documents sent to the jury and the defense, which lay out the prosecutor's basic game plan as well as the "rules of the game". Performing actual legal research and writing was quite a thrill, even if it was limited in scope and frequency because I had not yet been to law school.

All in all, my internship far exceeded my expectations. Everyday would be different because (unfortunately) crime is happening all the time. There was never a boring day, and every task was a learning opportunity. I feel like I learned more about my city and my fellow citizens than I had in the previous eighteen years that I lived in Seattle. After all, one great thing about working in public service—particularly local government—is that one can interact with people from all walks of life and all corners of the region.

In addition, the attorneys (my supervisors) were all fun and inspiring people. They all seemed to love their jobs, and were truly happy to be involved in public service. A current of morality flowed through the office because justice (not conviction rates or body counts) was always the sole goal. Furthermore, unlike many other legal jobs, there are no clients to serve (other than the community) and there is no need to keep track of billable hours. Everyone works hard—legal externs included—but work-life balance is well maintained.

Although there were many great moments during my summer, one particularly memorable one was when my attorney and I played some jail tape clips for the jury in one of our trials. After making several self-incriminating statements, which basically amounted to a confession, the defendant stated (in the jail tape), "don't worry...those lawyers record these

conversations but they never listen to them...it'll be smooth sailing". Playing that clip for the jury, in the presence of the defendant, was a special moment because it reminded everyone in the courtroom (defendant included) that the system ultimately bends towards justice. On top of that, it was extremely rewarding to have found such a perfect set of statements after weeks of combing through otherwise innocuous jail tape material.

Of course, the summer was not without its challenges. As a pre-law intern amongst several cohorts of law students, I had fewer legal skills and I fell through the cracks when it came to official orientation and training programs. Moreover, reading about atrocious crimes all day can be draining. However, it was fairly easy to stay motivated knowing that so many lives would be heavily impacted by the quality of my unit's work. And even though I didn't have any legal skills, I quickly developed a few specialties that made me a valuable part of the office.

My career exploration is far from over. However, after these past ten weeks, I am fairly confident that I wish to be involved in criminal justice in some manner, and I am absolutely certain that I wish to be involved in public service. I plan to take a few criminal law classes at the University of Tokyo (where I will be getting a Master of Public Policy degree), and I am currently studying for the LSAT. I am extremely grateful to have had this experience—Harvard opens many doors, but it is fellowships like these that let students walk through.

The King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office is headquartered in Downtown Seattle and employs approximately 200 attorneys and 200 staff. The Criminal Division ensures that justice is served by prosecuting all felonies (and many misdemeanors) occurring within King County, on behalf of the State of Washington. The Civil Division provides legal counsel to clients in the county government. The Family Support division maintains and supports the county's child support system. The office is currently led by Dan Satterberg, King County Prosecuting Attorney, who was elected to a four-year term in 2010.