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My Legal Fellowship Experience

As a freshman, I made it a goal of mine to one day be a part of Siena's Summer Legal Fellowship Program. This year I was able to make that goal a reality, as I was selected to participate in the fellowship program at the Government Law Center (GLC) of Albany Law School. Throughout the summer I was tasked with three major assignments; researching and writing two essays on the different ways the government deals with blight, finding recent articles about Albany's Citizens Police Review Board and writing a memorandum on my findings, and lastly working with a client from the Rural Law Initiative and writing a memorandum to the client.

My first assignment, researching and writing about ways of dealing with blight, was an assignment to test my writing abilities and learn a little bit about an issue near and dear to the law school's heart. This assignment wasn't going to be used as a memorandum to a client, or even serve an essential function to the law school, it was simply a way that Andy, my supervisor, could simultaneously examine my writing ability and teach me about an issue the GLC feels is important. One of the methods I wrote about was eminent domain. As you know, eminent domain is the government's right to expropriate private property for public use as long as just compensation is given in return. I had never known this prior and found it extremely interesting. Through my research, I stumbled upon several controversial cases where eminent domain had been used, but none of them more famous than the Kelo case. The culmination of my research on eminent domain was a paper that examined a few cases and ultimately came to a conclusion that the use of the phrase "public use" in the law needed to be revised. The other method of curing blight that I examined was through the use of the quasi governmental entities known as landbanks. I wrote a paper on landbanks that examined how they operate, their strengths, and their weaknesses. Once I had completed these two essays, it was time to move on to an assignment more essential to the law school.

The next assignment I was tasked with during my time at the law school was to find recent articles about Albany's Citizens Police Review Board (CPRB), and eventually write a memorandum

about what I had uncovered through these articles. When I was first assigned this not only did I not know what the CPRB was, but I had no clue the relevance of this project. So, Clay, my supervisor for this particular project gave me a brief explanation answering both of my quandaries. Just as he explained it to me, I will explain it you. First, the CPRB is an independent establishment created by the city of Albany whose job is to essentially police the police, along with improve communications and relations between the community and the Police Department. Having provided an explanation to help understand what the CPRB is, now on to how this organization connects to the Government Law Center and why I was asked to do this. The GLC of Albany Law School provides substantial support services to assist the CPRB in its duties, Clay being the one that is actually tasked with this duty at the GLC. One of specific duties he is in charge of is helping new board members learn about the cases in which the CPRB intervenes. In order to teach new members about the cases that the Board deals with, the GLC started a binder filled with news articles featuring past cases in which it has gotten involved with. By having me research these types of cases and tasking me to write a memorandum on what my research unearthed, it allowed the GLC to add some more recent articles to the binder, see if these articles are accomplishing their purpose, and discover what other unexpected revelations new members may get as a result of reading them. For me, the articles definitely accomplished their goal and also opened my eyes to all of the police controversy in the Albany area. This task was more enjoyable and absolutely more essential to the law school than my first, but it fails in comparison to my work with the Rural Law Initiative.

My final assignment, and the one I enjoyed the most, was working with a client as part of the Rural Law Initiative. The Rural Law Initiative is a program within the GLC in which the GLC offers free legal education and assistance to entrepreneurs, small businesses, and farms in rural areas. For this project, I reported to the GLC's senior staff attorney Kendra Sena. The particular client I worked with had many pressing questions. After a few phone conversations with the client, I was tasked with researching answers to the myriad of quandaries the client had. One of the bigger questions revolved around increasing her company's revenue/financial capital stream. After some research, I found that the client could do that through applying for a grant offered by the USDA, attempt to attain funds through a

crowdfunding company, or by joining a co-op. Another question the client had was whether or not to change her business structure from a partnership to an LLC or corporation to limit her personal liability. As a result of my research, I discovered that the switch to an LLC, or corporation, was useless if in a lawsuit someone could prove that the corporate veil had been pierced. To further explain, the corporate veil is the strict distinction between a business's financial affairs and the owner's financial affairs. This client grouped all of her money together and let her business revenue go straight to her personal checking account, thus piercing the corporate veil and rendering a switch pointless. Another question the client had was about putting a physical store on her personal property. This forced me to research the zoning codes for her town, which I have to say was one of my most difficult tasks I did while at the law school. All of this research culminated in a memorandum to client addressing her questions and examining possible solutions. This task was by far the most time consuming, but it was the most enjoyable to me because of the interactive nature to it. I love talking, and being a part of the Rural Law Initiative allowed me to talk with a variety of people on a regular basis. This task, much more than the rest, reassured me I want to be a lawyer.

Working as a legal fellow this summer was an awesome experience. Through the three major projects I was given, I learned a lot about about the law and a lot about myself. I learned about the process of eminent domain, and found it to be extremely interesting. I also learned about the role of landbanks, which I did not find as interesting. I reassured myself that although I do not enjoy research, I love interacting with others. Most of all, I learned that I want to become a lawyer.