

Good evening everyone. First, I would like to thank President Judge Clark for her kind introduction. I would also like to thank PLAN for the great work that they continue to do. In particular, I would like to thank Executive Director Patrick Cicero and Administrative Officer Arlene Marshall-Hockensmith for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to address this esteemed class of MLK interns. I am humbled by the opportunity to share a few words as you close this summer of extraordinary opportunity and equally extraordinary challenge. You all are part of what can only be described as *history*. This has been one of the most challenging times that the world has experienced; I certainly have experienced nothing like this in my lifetime. As you exhale from the vicissitudes of this summer, I understand there are more challenging times ahead as your law schools navigate how they will deliver your legal education in the coming months as we continue to suffer under this pandemic. So tonight, I want to encourage you and celebrate you for your accomplishments this summer.

We have heard a lot of talk about “essential workers” during this battle with COVID-19. We've dubbed certain professions as “essential”—and rightfully so, because without them, things would have ground to a screeching halt, and our country would have suffered greatly. Doctors, nurses, police officers, firefighters,

package delivery, take out delivery, grocery store clerks, my court staff (they wanted to make sure I included them) and so many more uncelebrated and often unrecognized folks have made us feel comfortable, safe and protected.

Well, I will add another group to that category this evening, and that is you and the organizations you worked for this summer. When the country shut down, the courts had to keep going. Like all the other essential staff, legal services had to continue. We continued to hold delinquency and dependency hearings for juveniles, Protection from Abuse hearings, and emergency hearings for guardianship and other matters that could not just be discontinued. And as we all know, in times of crisis for our nation, the folks that get hurt the most are the poor and the marginalized, those most in need of the services you helped to provide this summer. I want to honor your efforts this summer.

I honor Kendra for the essential work she did with the Pennsylvania Health Law Project, where she worked with clients from all walks of life that were struggling to navigate the health care system, defending medically fragile children when their Medicaid insurance companies tried to reduce their in-home services, fragile seniors, and people with disabilities who were in danger of losing their necessary

Home Care Services. I applaud her for being able to share her story as the sister of someone with autism in order to relate to a client who may have just needed to know that their loved one mattered.

I honor Sharai for her essential work with Community Legal Services in the Family Advocacy Unit, where she was able to see up close and personal how race and poverty have been criminalized in the child welfare system, where she was emboldened to see her role as a child welfare advocate, and where she was able to increase her knowledge of the intersections between the child welfare and criminal justice systems. I was impressed by her self-reflection as she began to realize how rare she was in the legal profession as a black Caribbean American woman, but how vitally important her role could be in transforming the lives of disadvantaged children and families through law and policy.

I honor Zane for his essential work with the Neighborhood Legal Services, where he learned that people in need were always looking for more than just advice, that they were often seeking reassurance that things were going to be okay, that they needed more than just lip service, but a genuine commitment to the

problems and situations they face. He developed the willingness to truly listen and to hear someone's story in order to create a lasting impact on their lives.

I honor Bingran for her essential work with the Pennsylvania Institutional Law project, where she helped develop a case chart regarding qualifications for disability for transgender people under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which helped her develop a clearer understanding of gender dysphoria and society's acceptance about the same. She conducted research on transgender issues under the ADA and the 8th Amendment. She was able to assist in cases involving a transgender inmate who was denied appropriate medical care, an inmate denied accommodations for pain, and a pregnant inmate who was put in medical isolation and had her labor induced.

I honor Jessica for her essential work with Regional Housing Legal Services, where she embraced the mission of establishing sustainable affordable housing developments in urban areas, where she learned about low-income housing tax credits and how they can be applied to housing development projects as well as the mass evictions that occur when a landlord decides to take a rental property off

the market. She developed a sense of the importance of affordable housing, especially in light of the pandemic and the unemployment it has created.

I honor Juliana for her essential work with Philadelphia Legal Assistance in their Housing Unit, where she focused on preventing low income homeowners from losing their homes. She assisted in obtaining documents from the office of the register of wills on how to determine if a writ of execution had been issued against the client and whether there was a Sheriff sale scheduled, and she used various tools for calculating the value of property. In light of the pandemic, she developed knowledge about the everchanging mortgage relief and forbearance programs rolled out by the government.

I honor Ashley for her essential work at Justice at Work, where she focused on providing legal aid to low-wage immigrant workers and legal representation and community education to immigrants and migrant workers on their legal rights. She was impacted by a case that involved assisting a client with her personal statement to obtain a U-visa. This female immigrant worker was the subject of sexual harassment at the hands of her coworkers and supervisor, but found the

courage to report her harassment, despite her fear of termination. And as Ashley described, because of her bravery, she was given the opportunity to stay in the United States with her three children.

I honor Jason for his essential work with Mid Penn Legal Services. As Jason comes to the end of his law school career, his commitment to working with the underserved population that Mid Penn serves is commendable. His work with victims of abuse as they seek orders of protection from the court saves lives. Through this process, he developed patience, helpfulness, and an understanding of the importance of being forthright with his clients, the defendants, opposing counsel, judges, and the court staff, which will serve him well in the future. His stated commitment to public service over the lure of “big law” is inspiring.

I honor Gabrielle for her essential work with Community Justice Project, where she engaged in virtual trainings and began to learn the inner workings of Pennsylvania poverty law. Though the picture was not always clear on how remedies could be fashioned for disadvantage clients, Gabrielle was able to see that David in fact could triumph over Goliath at times. She was able to see this

play out in the virtual eviction tracking project when violations of the counties' moratorium on evictions were found. Though the evictions had already occurred, the Community Justice Project went to work in contacting judges and magistrates, and many of those cases were withdrawn, settled, or discontinued or marked as administratively closed, effectively removing them from the public docket and avoiding the negative effects on tenants' future housing applications.

Finally, I honor Iman for her essential work with the Pennsylvania Utility Law Project, where she focused on policy related to Pennsylvania's low income home energy assistance program and thinking creatively about how to benefit the energy and utility needs of individuals living in poverty. Iman recognized the importance of being a voice for the voiceless, as she described her desire to be a "mouthpiece" to achieve the wants and needs of her clients. She also was able to see the organization she worked for release a statement in response to PLAN's call to action to condemn persistent racism within and the violence perpetuated by the justice system following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

You all are truly worthy of being honored and praised this evening. It is no small task becoming Drum Majors for Justice, especially in the model of Dr. King. He left a one-of-a-kind example.

Though these individual cases may seem insignificant in light of the great challenges our legal system faces as we deal with the twin tragedies of the pandemic and the systemic racism that George Floyd's death exposed, I honor your achievements because it is young, bright future lawyers like you who have an expressed commitment to the poor, the underserved and the marginalized, those who suffer the most under the weight of an unequal system, that can help us reach that lofty goal of true social justice. I am so proud of this program and your commitment to seeking equal justice under the law. I will leave you with this quote from W. Clement Stone, a 19th century American businessman and philanthropist: "Big doors swing on little hinges." Thank you for allowing yourselves to be the "hinges" on the very big and heavy door that leads to equal justice for all.

Thank you.

