

Pennsylvania
LegalAid Network, Inc.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Summer Internship and Fellowship Program

THE DRUM MAJOR

Class of 2021 Essay Collection



"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.
Louise Brookins Building
118 Locust Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17101

July 28, 2021

To the 2021 Martin Luther King, Jr. Interns:

These are quite extraordinary times and from what we have heard from our programs, you have risen to the occasion! Each year, we ask our MLK Interns to write an essay in an effort to capture in words, the experiences they have had during the summer. We are pleased to present you with the 2021 edition of **THE DRUM MAJOR**, which is the collection of these essays.

Through your work during the past ten weeks, you have touched the lives of many clients. Our programs and clients are better because of your service. You learned how to use your skills to make equal justice closer to a reality.

For this, we thank you. As you continue your law school career, we hope that this summer increased your desire to serve others and seek justice for those with nowhere else to turn.

Very Truly Yours,



Patrick Cicero, Esq.
Executive Director



Very Truly Yours,



Arlene A. Marshall-Hockensmith, Esq.
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Host Program: Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania

Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. (Amen) Say that I was a drum major for peace. (Yes) I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. (Yes) I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., The Drum Major Instinct

BECOMING A DRUM MAJOR FOR JUSTICE

On February 4, 1968, at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his sermon, “The Drum Major Instinct.” In his sermon, Dr. King spoke of an innate, human desire, “a desire to be out front, a desire to lead the parade, a desire to be first,” which he called the drum major instinct and encouraged anyone listening to use their own drum major instinct to serve others and promote justice. Dr. King recognized that this instinct is something that we all carry and it is up to us to make sure that we do not let it become destructive; to make sure that we harness this instinct of ours in service of others. Failing to harness this instinct is, as Dr. King says, a tragedy. We all have an instinct to be heard and to be great, but what a waste it would be to stray from the chance to serve others in the pursuit of attention and status.

This summer, I had the pleasure of working with Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania (LASP) whose mission is to provide residents of Southeastern Pennsylvania with quality legal representation and to empower members of the community by providing access to legal education and increasing access to the courts. During my time at LASP, I learned a variety of substantive law areas and worked with a diverse array of clients—all of which made for a meaningful, educational experience. As a first-generation law student, I felt lucky to experience such an impactful summer experience and to explore who I am as a law student and future attorney. I admit that I was concerned about how a fully virtual internship would work. I also worried that it would be harder to connect with my fellow colleagues.

However, I found that to not be the case. Since I began my internship, I worked with other attorneys and interns in the office and connected with people across the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network. From helping other staff attorneys with research assignments, to observing officewide staff trainings, my summer was filled with unique educational experiences that I will carry forward with me and inform my way of thinking.

During my internship, a significant amount of my time involved working on LASP's Mobile Home Tax Reassessment Project. While working on this project, I spoke with numerous clients and learned more about how LASP helps people in the community reassess their homes and save money on their property taxes. I saw how this project benefitted our neighbors in the community and how we have the ability to help so many more. This is what drew me to the public interest sector. Being able to connect with clients and help the underserved through outreach and education is so important. LASP works hard to ensure that their clients are getting the assistance they need. This summer, I worked with custody clients, clients seeking Protection From Abuse Orders, and assisted with an unemployment compensation research assignment. I found myself channeling my drum major instinct when I spoke with clients. Being there to calm a nervous client or to help a client through a tough situation is rewarding. Working with clients allowed me to learn through experience the ways in which I can connect with them in order to understand the best ways to help them. I am not in this profession to be praised but to help my community get equal access to legal assistance, despite any barriers. Dr. King's sermon impacts the way I do my daily work and I look forward to continuing to learn how to use my drum major instinct to serve others.

My experience at LASP has not only given me an incredible opportunity to learn about the kind of attorney I want to be, but to use my drum major instinct to serve the people in my community. I had the fortunate experience of working one-on-one with clients, to learn from them, and to see how even the smallest of actions can make a positive difference. This summer gave me the chance to harness my drum major instinct, which Dr. King urges us to use not for superiority, but for service to others, and to make a change, no matter how small. As I continue to grow in my legal career journey, Dr. King's words will stay with me. I will continue to learn to better myself for the sake of helping others.

As Dr. King said, "[E]verybody can be great, because everybody can serve." I, too, am eager to be a drum major for justice through serving others.



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Host Program: Pennsylvania Health Law Project

Yes, Jesus, I want to be on your right or your left side, not for any selfish reason. I want to be on your right or your left side, not in terms of some political kingdom or ambition. But I just want to be there in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world a new world.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., The Drum Major Instinct

CREATING A NEW WORLD

Since working as a legal intern at Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP), I have felt great frustration at seeing low-income and marginalized clients struggle to access health care. Access to healthcare is a right, not a privilege. Yet, I learned from working at PHLP that many Pennsylvanians cannot afford healthcare. Only some qualify for Medicaid if their income is above a certain federal poverty level. Because the federal poverty level limit drops at age 65, many Pennsylvanians lose their Medicaid when they age out. I worked with a 65 year old client who was dropped from Medicaid because she was over the federal poverty level limit by \$3. I watched the devastation my client experienced when she realized that, despite our efforts, there was nothing else that we could do for her.

Because Medicaid is jointly funded by the federal government and states, on the state level, clients must deal with Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) who control their eligibility and access to Medicaid services. MCOs are complex and PHLP plays an essential role in helping clients to navigate that system. The appeal process for Medicaid eligibility and denial of services is particularly tricky for clients to navigate. It is intimidating, overwhelming, and feels like an insurmountable challenge. PHLP's Executive Director, Laval Miller-Wilson, once said to me, "People feel defeated or are easily defeated when they are sick. Illness weakens us and when we are in the midst of illness like trying to overcome a disability or a cancer, it is easy to miss things. It's easy to miss appeal dates and miss the fine print."

During my internship, I worked with sick and disabled clients who missed appeal deadlines, grievance hearings, and deadlines to request external reviews. My clients expressed relief when they learned that they would receive my counsel and representation. Interning at PHLP showed me that attorneys and legal advocates are the gatekeepers to ensuring that clients know their rights, understand their rights, and are empowered to exercise their rights. Not only are we gatekeepers, but we are also bridges, providing our clients access to important documentation and resources that would be hard for them to access otherwise.

I am affected by the stories of my many clients who were denied Medicaid eligibility and services. During a phone intake, my 54-year-old client wept as she continually repeated to me, "I am pathetic." This client, like many of the other clients that I represented, was denied Personal Assistance Services (PAS) hours that she depended on in order to not be helpless and vulnerable to her medical conditions. By representing my client, not only did I advocate for her to receive the PAS hours to which she is entitled, but I also advocated for her human dignity to be restored.

MCOs also took away another one of my client's PAS hours clinically without consideration of their personal circumstances. Currently, I am representing a 14 year old, a non-verbal paraplegic client who experienced seizures and exhibited self-injurious behavior. For PAS hours, this client received seven skilled nursing hours a day. When my client's father lost his job due to COVID-19, his skilled nursing hours decreased to eight hours per week. The MCO did not consider my client's other familial factors such as his six siblings in the household and that his mother, too, struggled with a physical disability. They did not consider that, by drastically reducing my client's skilled nursing hours, his father's role as his caregiver would increase thus affording him less time to search for a job. I am hopeful that my representation of this client will result in his getting back his skilled nursing hours.

During my summer experience, my confidence increased in advocating for clients- special thanks to my supervisors Katy McKee and Marissa LaWall. It was a joy to learn from Katy and also Marissa who is a former Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Intern and Fellow. Never have I experienced such open and accessible communication from supervisors. They were readily accessible to discuss and brainstorm my cases and to review and suggest revisions to my written work. Not only were my supervisors attentive, but many of the staff reached out to welcome me and offer their assistance if needed. Every week, the PHLP community made an intentional effort to encourage and celebrate each other's accomplishments. The PHLP community celebrated me when I was able to advocate on behalf of a client with the County Assistance Office (CAO) to get Medicaid benefits reinstated for her newborn with health needs. This positive support allowed me to blossom in PHLP's work environment.

In Martin Luther King, Jr.'s last sermon, entitled "The Drum Major Instinct," he exhorts us that by finding significance through love, justice, truth, and a commitment to others we can make this world a new world.

PHLP staff are determined to create a new world where all Pennsylvanians can have access to optimal health outcomes. I attended Consumer Subcommittee Meetings and discussion sessions with MCO's where PHLP advocated for policy changes that would benefit the low-income and marginalized communities that we serve. I want to be a part of PHLP's efforts to create this new world. I am happy to share that I accepted the offer by PHLP to be sponsored by the program as a 2022 PHLP Fellow!

Over the past two summers, my participation in PLAN's Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Intern Program solidified my desire to become a public interest attorney that serves disenfranchised communities through health law. Without this amazing program, I would not have the opportunity to become a PHLP Fellow. I am grateful for Arlene Marshall-Hockensmith's mentorship and support. She helped me to thrive in both of my internships. Furthermore, I am grateful to be a part of the legacy of the PLAN Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship Program. I know my future is bright and look forward to making this program proud.



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Recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's a new definition of greatness... by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great because everybody can serve.

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

EXPLORING THE DRUM MAJOR INSTINCT

It's easy to be clouded by the noise of societal expectations that our drum major instinct too becomes clouded. And although our drum major instinct may drive us to surpass others, desiring recognition, importance, and attention, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr preached the significance of being a drum major for the right priorities– a sentiment that continues to resonate more than fifty years later with new depth and meaning. Although my legal undertaking is nascent, I hope that my background and experiences will allow me to cut through the noise, holding on to my humanity to always serve others.

This summer, I worked at the Pennsylvania Utility Law Project, (“PULP”), a specialized component of the non-profit Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, which serves all of Pennsylvania by providing representation, information, assistance, and advice about residential utility and energy matters affecting low-income consumers. Despite unprecedented times due to the ongoing pandemic, PULP found creative, alternative solutions to continue assisting Pennsylvania residents with quality civil legal aid. Thus, it was no surprise that as a summer intern working remotely, the PULP staff seamlessly incorporated me into their family, providing me with the support to learn and grow. They made it a point to introduce me at every meeting and welcomed me with open arms. Immediately, I felt a sense of belonging.

Prior to interning at PULP, I was unaware of the implications of energy burdens on the health and wellbeing of families and individuals. While utility insecurity existed before the pandemic, the onset of COVID-19 has exacerbated the hardship faced by low-income households and has further contributed to the ongoing utility debt crisis as mounting arrearages reach an unprecedented amount.

However, unsurprisingly, the pre-existing energy burden and economic hardship induced by the pandemic fell hardest on minority residents and vulnerable populations. As I began to understand the pervasiveness of energy poverty, I began to conceptualize my role at PULP and how I could channel my drum major instinct.

During my time at PULP, I examined policy regarding the Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), a federal program that helps low-income households pay for home energy bills, energy crisis, weatherization, and energy-related minor home repairs. Although LIHEAP provides critical resources to Pennsylvania's energy consumers, the different aspects and components of LIHEAP often change year to year, presenting barriers for vulnerable households to receive assistance. With the guidance and help of the PULP staff, I provided recommendations on how LIHEAP can be amended to directly benefit low-income consumers and identified eligibility barriers to help increase access to enrollment. In presenting oral testimony at the LIHEAP public hearing and submitting formal comments to the Department of Human Services, I took part in helping to advance policy solutions that ameliorated economic and systemic injustice.

Furthermore, despite working remotely, I never felt disconnected from the PULP team. In many ways, being remote allowed me the opportunity to be a part of meetings and conversations from organizations across Pennsylvania including Community Legal Services, CASA, the Coalition for Affordable Utility Services and Energy Efficiency (CAUSE-PA), and POWER. I was provided with the space to explore my interest regarding public service opportunities, reflecting on how my strengths can best serve others. In collaborating with multiple organizations, I gained exposure to different types of advocacy strategies and approaches.

Moreover, each meeting, whether internally or with partnered organizations, had a purpose. It felt empowering to meet so many community-based organizations and legal service providers focused on addressing systemic injustice in housing, energy, water, and utility services. Ultimately, being a part of a team within a larger network of teams, working towards a common goal of economic and social justice was motivating.

Above all, while working at PULP, I witnessed passionate attorneys and advocates exercise the drum major instinct, fighting for justice and equality for people from all walks of life without the need for recognition. As I continue in my legal endeavors, exploring and reflecting on how I can be a drum major for justice, I am appreciative of my experience at PULP and for the people I have met.



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Host Program: Justice at Work

Recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's a new definition of greatness... by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great because everybody can serve.

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

"PLAN"NING TO SERVE OTHERS

Like so many others, I came to law school excited at the prospect of hands-on, practical experiences that would help me to serve my community of South-Central Pennsylvania in the future. Along with that goal came a desire to stand out amongst my classmates as a bright and dedicated student. Through the Martin Luther King, Jr. Internship Program, I put a name to this inner desire to set myself apart from others, this instinct to be first, and learned how to harness it to my benefit through legal aid work. My internship experience with Justice at Work (JaW), a non-profit legal aid office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, reinforced my desire to use my skills to serve my community, specifically those populations historically hindered from access to the justice system.

Initially, I was uncertain about the prospect of a fully remote legal internship. However, the welcoming atmosphere of JaW, even through Zoom, quickly assuaged my worries. I received an in-depth look at work done by JaW by many different attorneys and staff. JaW specializes in immigration and employment law for low-wage immigrant workers in Pennsylvania, specifically farm workers, landscape workers, and food processing workers. I was drawn to JaW because of their vision of empowering low-wage workers to know and defend their rights, regardless of immigration status.

It was easy to find meaning and pride in my assignments because of the example set by the attorneys with whom I interacted. To see their commitment and endless motivation to their clients in potential years-long fights for visas or a day in court made every project more enjoyable. It was also a source of motivation for me to put my best foot forward in every task, whether in researching a legal question, interviewing a client, or drafting a memo. It has been my experience that it is up to me to cherish every opportunity by asking questions, taking the initiative to be involved in cases, and seeking out feedback.

It is my wholehearted feeling that the best part of my internship was working with JaW staff. The staff includes a mixture of attorneys with varying years of experiences and stages of their careers. They all gave me many different perspectives of an attorney in the legal aid world. I loved hearing about their journeys, experiences, and insights. It was motivating to catch glimpses of their unpretentiousness, motivation, and passion for their field and their clients. I feel that the attorneys and staff at JaW have successfully harnessed their individual "drum major instinct" to create an inclusive organization to advocate and serve their clients.

My experiences with JaW this summer have given me a new perspective on Dr. King's sermon on the "drum major instinct." One of the most meaningful experiences of my internship came about through a side project. In doing some research into an adverse party, I participated in interviewing a trafficking survivor. The client was a woman who moved from South America to the states with her husband in 2018. When he fell seriously ill, she found work and a place to stay in a private care home in Philadelphia as a housekeeper. She was made to work every day for upwards of 12 hours with no breaks for only \$100 a week. During her employment, she was subject to sexual assault by another person living in the home. When she reported it to the owner, she was forced to leave and ended up in a homeless shelter. She came to JaW looking for information about her rights and legal protections. Listening to her story and hearing how her employer contributed to her vulnerability and homelessness was a sobering experience. I witnessed and appreciated firsthand the grit and mettle necessary to handle cases involving such injustice committed by one person against another. Seeing her strength and that of so many clients in similar situations served as a constant reminder of the importance of legal aid work.

A quote that's always resonated with me is, "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand." I believe that participation in an internship within the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network was the right one. The incredible amount of interaction and opportunities to dive into hands-on advocacy work within the community has been invaluable. Looking at my experiences through the "drum major instinct" lens has made them all the more fulfilling. In the past, I would have felt satisfaction from my experience based on the skills I acquired and the knowledge that the experience would benefit me professionally in the future. As I reflect on my experience today, it is also with a feeling of fulfillment for having been able to use those skills to benefit my community.



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Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

NAVIGATING MY OWN PATH

I have always known that I wanted to be an attorney. People would always ask, “why?” My response was: *This is what feels right for me.* At this point in my legal career journey, all I know is that I want to help people. Yeah, what I saw in my legal drama shows looked fun and powerful, but through watching those legal dramas, I only imagined myself as the prosecutor, defense attorney, or judge. I never saw myself as anything else but an actor in the legal field. Sure, I could help people in other ways, but to me, there was no option other than the legal field. After listening to Dr. King’s Drum Major Instinct sermon, I recognize that my drive to be an attorney to help others comes from that drum major instinct.

Law is created and carried out by individuals and no one individual is without flaw. Like these individuals, the law and legal system are flawed. I want to be an attorney who helps people and there is no better way to help than to help those who need it the most but cannot afford it. Interning this past summer for Northwestern Legal Service (NWLS) exposed me to various circumstances and people. Public interest advocates serve people in communities who cannot afford private representation. These people are often overlooked in our legal system.

While working at NWLS, I witnessed firsthand the gap between these low-income communities and legal professionals. Since our legal system tends to overlook many of these individuals, a trust barrier exists between these individuals and the people in the legal system. At my internship, I witnessed many of the clients lack of trust in their attorneys because they felt unheard by the legal system. Attorneys working in public interest law possess the drum major instinct. They fight for their clients, not only in the legal system, but in their communities to gain their trust and demonstrate that they are there to help. These attorneys are paving a pathway between these individuals to help bridge the gap between low-income communities and the legal system.

I am grateful for my internship experience and my role in helping to bridge the gap. I learned that the law goes beyond what you read in the textbooks. These are people's lives and they are putting them in our hands. I hope to continue my work in this field and will use the skills gained from this internship to be a strong advocate for vulnerable communities in need of legal service. I am proud to say that this internship has helped me solidify the fact that this is what I want to do. This is what I know I am supposed to do in life.



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ADVOCATION NOT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

When I think of the legal field, I instantly think about how competitive it is and everyone's desire to be first and important. Some folks can lose sight of what an attorney really does, which is ultimately advocating for others. Just as Martin Luther King, Jr. had a desire to be known for his service to others, the same stands true for myself. I have no desire to be praised based on superficial standards and awards. One of the main reasons why I decided to go to law school was to become a better advocate for others. This is the reason why I enjoy working in public service. Before law school, I worked with vulnerable populations at the Miami-Dade County States Attorney's Office. Later, I moved to New York City as an AmeriCorps member to advocate for Black and Latinx communities to have more mentors.

When I think about my path to becoming an attorney, I see myself serving others to have a more fulfilling life. I really enjoyed my summer with Regional Housing Legal Services (RHLS). I was able to see how folks in their ever-changing communities work with developers to sustain affordable housing to ensure that those living in these communities can remain there. As housing needs continue to rise, it is important for developers and the community members to work together to achieve their individual goals. This summer, I joined RHLS at a zoning hearing where I witnessed a strong Philadelphia community voicing their concerns about a development project. It was a great experience because I saw how this type of hearing actually plays out and how different it was from something like a civil or criminal hearing. During the hearing, I heard the frustration and passion of community members opposing the project. The type of work RHLS does is incredibly important because, at a zoning hearing like this one, having an attorney to articulate the facts versus the feelings of a project gives community members a better chance at challenging the project or zoning variance.

During my short time with RHLS, I learned so much about the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and how it is the largest funding source for affordable housing across the country. I witnessed RHLS advocate for the best outcome for new projects. Additionally, it was great to see how my supervising attorney was able to balance both the needs of the client with the needs of other community groups.

I worked on a lot of transactional assignments which was a change for me; however, I learned the importance of this work. I read and reviewed a large number of the detailed contracts written in the best interest of RHLS' clients. I learned the importance of using critical language and that re-reading contracts at different times of the day or week allows you to spot things easier.

One of my biggest assignments involved writing a legal memo on the Right of First Refusal between a non-profit developer and an investor working together to build or renovate an affordable housing building. I learned so much about property rights and how these deals can actually benefit or hurt both parties.

Overall, I really admire the work RHLS undertakes to bridge developers, non-profits, and community members together to create sustainable housing. Despite being remote, the staff always made me feel included in meetings or events. The RHLS staff is friendly and very helpful, especially when it came to understanding new tax concepts. I am grateful for my two supervising attorneys who made sure I has meaningful experiences. I received helpful feedback that I intend to keep in mind as I continue my path to becoming an attorney.



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Host Program: Community Justice Project

PURSUING PEACE THROUGH JUSTICE

The first time I heard the phrase, “no justice, no peace,” I thought it was a threat—a well-deserved threat to continue civil disobedience until there was justice, justice for the Black lives lost at the hands of police officers, for pervasive systematic racism, for the centuries of injustice based on skin color. “Good,” I thought. “No one deserves peace while these injustices continue.” But over the past year, I have begun to understand this phrase differently, not as a threat but as a truth. “No justice, no peace” is a truism that persists no matter whether there is civil disobedience in the popular media or not.

The truth is when there is injustice there is no real peace. There may be a facsimile of peace, a security for the people who are not experiencing this injustice firsthand, but there is no true peace. What I had previously thought was peace was actually oppression, complacency, and ignorance. Justice is integral for peace. Without it the privileged may experience quiet, but as justice languishes, there is no peace.

It may seem a paradox that fighting brings peace, but that is what fighting for justice does. This summer, I became a part of a community striving for justice. Through my work with Community Justice Project (CJP), I helped to disrupt the status quo—which I previously understood as peace—in order to bring true peace through justice. In the fight for justice, it is imperative to “keep feeling the need for being first,” as Martin Luther King, Jr. advised in his drum major sermon. I felt motivated to win each of these battles for justice—channeling my drum major instinct into a zealous advocacy.

Martin Luther King, Jr., also said in his drum major sermon that he wanted “to be there in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world a new world.” Through my summer with CJP, I was there in love for parents who could not afford care for their children. I was there in justice for people who were over-taxed by their local government. I was there in truth for families mired in the Child Protective System. I was there in commitment to people with Limited English Proficiency seeking equitable access to the justice system. I believe CJP is making of this old world a new world—a more just world, a more peaceful world.

I found that serving others in need requires a dichotomy: the humility to empathize with others and see their struggles as imperative to your own survival, and the pride to identify your strengths and use them to be the greatest servant. When King opined that “the church is the one place where the lawyer ought to forget that he’s a lawyer,” he was making a statement about the church’s undue focus on the prestige of its congregants. The phrase resonated with me, however, because I think there are many times where lawyers need to forget they are lawyers. Forget about your education, career, and pedigree, and instead remember your humanity shared with those who are suffering. Then, it is vital to remember those privileges of education and training—remember you are a lawyer so you can use that privilege to be the greatest servant.

Through my work at CJP, I experienced what an aspiring lawyer can do on behalf of others. While I conducted research, I gained a deeper understanding of society. While I catalogued counties’ efforts at providing language access, I learned the methodology currently in place to further justice. While I wrote memos, I imagined a world that could be more just and proffered ideas of how to reach that goal. While I discussed cases, my eyes were opened to client stories and struggles.

This summer, I saw first-hand what I may be able to achieve as a lawyer. I learned how lawyers can bring people together in the shared pursuit of righting a common wrong. Lawyers can create communities around the pursuit of justice: of clients, of parties, of other lawyers, of government officials. I was a part of conversations in which lawyers dare to dream of a new world and use their vocational tools to dismantle the old world. Through the PLAN MLK, Jr. Summer Internship Program, I witnessed how my fellow MLK interns serve clients, advocate for policies, and affect change. I feel very honored to work with each of these great lawyers and law students.

As I picture my future career, I want to be successful. I want to be “great.” I want to be great just like the lawyers I have met through the PLAN MLK, Jr. Summer Internship Program. But in truth, many people will not consider me so if they misunderstand the true nature of the drum major instinct. I seek a definition of success not tracked by dollars made and cases won but by justices furthered and clients helped. As I enter my last year of law school, I enter anticipating a year of training to become a servant—a great servant pursuing peace through justice.



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Host Program: MidPenn Legal Services

COMMUNITY CLIENT CENTERING TO COMBAT AMERICA'S CASTE SYSTEM

Legal Aid is not a job; it is a lifestyle. Firms like MidPenn Legal Services; Community Justice Project; Neighborhood Legal Services –these are not just attorneys cohabitating a building, but rather families that collaborate toward more equitable societies. It is common for senior attorneys to have twenty –or even thirty or forty –years of tenure in the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN). It is a testament to PLAN's strength that so many advocates happily boast "I've been with PLAN since law school." There is an innate feeling of contentedness, working in a collaborative community where workers take pride in the cause.

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. warned, however, content collaboration is not the norm for public service. On the macro-level "nations of the world are engaged in a bitter, colossal contest for supremacy . . . we are drifting. And we are drifting there because nations are caught up with the drum major instinct–'I must be first.' --'I must be supreme' --'Our nation must rule the world.'" Law, as a field, is particularly susceptible to drum major egos. Lawyers train for years, learn convoluted language, and compete for community connections, all for the privilege of telling other people how to handle their affairs. Law is innately self-centered, even as it works to benefit others. From legal aid, I learned the import of community / client centered work. Without it, well-intentioned lawyers can feed the very societal ills that harmed their client in the first place.

My supervising attorney once shared a fitting metaphor: "A client's case is like a ship. Your job is to chart the courses through the waters –not tell them how to steer. If they want to crash the boat, that is their call to make. Their case, their lives; we are not in a position to decide what is best for them." Many of our clients are not free agents in their lives –the housing authority may tell them who can visit their apartment; the courts may tell them when they can see their kids; the public benefits agency may tell them how much they can spend each month. Giving the client agency to steer the ship's helm is a crucial change for self-help, education, and growth. Breaking cycles of dependency and misinformation depends on community members feeling empowered (not infantilized) during crises. Conversely, advocates can learn from the community's experiences so that legal advocacy targets systemic causes of poverty instead of simply stemming side-effects.

Client centered advocacy is also vital to community education regarding the cycle of poverty. Dr. King cautioned, our communities are constantly “supporting [our] oppressor, because through prejudice and blindness” we fail to see that America’s enduring caste system subjugates people of all races, genders, sexual identities, or family statuses. Misinformation about public benefits and systemic forces of poverty leaves individuals with shame, embarrassment, helplessness, and even depression or anxiety as they navigate crises. Commodification of human rights and services forces the majority of Americans into competition for nominally better ranks of subjugation under a wealthy elite. Recent numbers show the elite top one percent saw their wages grow by 157 percent over the last four decades, while the wages of the bottom 90 percent grew by only 24 percent.¹ “Income is unequal, but wealth is even more unequal,” said Alexandra Killewald, Professor of Sociology in the Harvard Faculty of Art and Sciences, who studies inequality in the contemporary United States.¹ As of April 12, 2021, America’s 719 billionaires held over four times (4x) more wealth (\$4.56 trillion) than all the 165,000,000 (165 million) Americans in society’s bottom half (\$1.01 trillion).² In 1990, the situation was reversed —billionaires were worth \$240 billion and the bottom 50 percent had \$380 billion in combined wealth. Misinformation and false beliefs encourage in-fighting to sustain inequality for the masses while holding privilege for the few.² Growing inequality and environmental destruction has spoiled the chances to have a better life than the previous generation and keeps the American dream out of reach for millions.

A crucial step toward pulling the American dream back within reach is, as Michael Renner put it, for “all of us, as citizens... to get over our classism and vote for the betterment of us all. We should be led by principles and morals and not by men.” Clamoring for personal glory and wealth has left the world divided and sick, fighting for ranks on a ladder going nowhere. For lasting public good, focus must shift to what a community can do together – rather than what the individual person can do. Recognizing living strengths of clients and communities can reveal areas for improvement, in the legal community and beyond. When advocates act as counselors and way finders rather than authorities, clients feel invested in their case. In turn, clients may re-evaluate stereotypical beliefs, or learn how to identify and help others in need. Like Dr. King, as a young advocate, “I just want to be there in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world a new world.” Living in service to others was Dr. King’s legacy; his call is to build this old world and its ‘drum major beat’ into something centered on community dignity, prosperity, and love.

¹ Mineo, Liz. Racial wealth gap may be a key to other inequities, Harvard Gazette (June 3, 2021) <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/06/racial-wealth-gap-may-be-a-key-to-other-inequities/>.

² Billionaire Pandemic Wealth Gains Of 55%, Or \$1.6 Trillion, Come Amid Three Decades of Rapid Wealth Growth (April 15, 2021). <https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/IPS-ATF-Billionaires-13-Month-31-Year-Report-copy.pdf>

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “The Drum Major Instinct.” (Feb. 4, 1968) <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/publications/knock-midnight-inspiration-great-sermons-reverend-martin-luther-king-jr-8>.

Michael Render, op.ed. “We could have freedom in an instant — if we organize” June 17, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/17/we-could-have-freedom-an-instant-if-we-organize/>.



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Host Program: North Penn Legal Services

The drum major instinct can lead to exclusivism in one's thinking and can lead one to feel that because he has some training, he's a little better than that person who doesn't have it. Or because he has some economic security, that he's a little better than that person who doesn't have it. And that's the uncontrolled, perverted use of the drum major instinct.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., 4 February 1968, Ebenezer Baptist Church

NOT FAR BEHIND

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., during his last sermon delivered at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, simultaneously warned and inspired the congregation. He eloquently told of the dangers associated with the desire to be noticed and to be deemed important and powerful. Dr. King spoke of the trap of the “Drum Major Instinct” and how, when not harnessed properly, it can lead to a path of selfish and harmful behavior. He delivered this vital message from the pulpit, only feet away from where his body was laid two months later at his funeral.

The description of the “Drum Major Instinct”, as voiced by Dr. King, serves as both a metaphorical and practical image for law students and practicing attorneys. The idea of a drum major—an individual who marches before the rest of the band, dressed in a flashy uniform, carrying a baton—summons feelings of respect. This high regard is given without much thought, created reflexively in an environment of pomp and circumstance. Law students often view practicing attorneys as the drum majors of the law; seasoned litigators standing in open court, delivering persuasive arguments for their clients. These admired drum majors of the law win their cases, drive cars with European engines, wear bespoke suits, and reside in prestigious zip codes.

The true drum majors of the law, however, are often not admired or even seen. They work in offices that do not touch the sky, they share resources with co-workers, and live in modest homes. Their clients appear in their offices with tears, anger, and fear. Their successes prevent their clients from losing their homes or the balance in their checking accounts. They help lift barriers to employment through expungements and pardons.

The true drum majors, the attorneys working for the public interest, are also often alone, in front of a group that may or may not follow.

The Bethlehem office of North Penn Legal Services (NPLS) is teeming with drum majors. They carry large caseloads and work under emergent circumstances daily. The attorneys at NPLS made the decision to take a meaningful path, oftentimes rocky, and sometimes uncharted. They act as the front-line defense in an ongoing conflict between abundance and need. Their work is deeply important and necessary; I came to appreciate this early on in my time working with them.

Legal aid work is not glamorous; it does not compensate at the high levels that corporate firms do nor does it come with the prestigious recognition from the public. I have often heard others disparage the work of legal aid attorneys or make assumptions that those who choose a path of service are in some way deficient in their legal knowledge or academic prowess. These assumptions are wildly untrue and are truly harmful to the work that is done daily in the pursuit of justice. I realize now that the presumptions made about legal aid work are usually created by those who have no desire to contribute to the good of the world. It is saddening to see other law students and practicing attorneys alike tout their elitist notions of what is valuable while simultaneously ignoring the very basic and universal truth that every person has worth. As Dr. King said, believing that we are better than others because of our educational level or financial situation is really a misguided and dangerous way of living.

I have been fortunate to attend law school and do not take that privilege for granted. When I started the process of applying to law schools I did so with the realization that I would be in possession of both a gift and a responsibility when receiving a legal education. We are given immense power and are entrusted to use it in ways that pursue justice and improve the world in which we live. I am humbled by this and even more so after spending time with the attorneys at NPLS. After my internship ends later this month, I will remember the lessons I learned and the people I met, and the vulnerability I saw. I will recall the drum majors, tucked away in their seasonably warm offices, leading by example. I hope to see the band not far behind.



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Host Program: Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Aid

A LOVE FOR HUMANITY: JUSTICE CAN'T WAIT

"I was a drum major for justice, peace, and righteousness," said Martin Luther King, Jr. at his Drum Major Instinct Sermon. During his speech, Dr. King emphasized the importance of public service and reminded people that he wanted the world to remember him for his love and compassion for humanity. Dr. King wanted to be remembered as a person who spent his life fighting against the injustices in this country. Like Dr. King, I, too, want to be remembered for my love for humanity; I want to be remembered for the impact, influence, and inspiration I leave in this world.

This summer, I had the privilege of interning at Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Aid (SPLA). SPLA is a civil law firm located in Washington County, Pennsylvania. SPLA specializes in domestic violence, divorce, juvenile delinquency, and protection from abuse cases. I spent most of my summer interviewing clients, researching laws, and filing petitions on behalf of families and individuals who experienced domestic violence and child neglect. As a law student who never worked in civil law, this experience exposed me to a new dimension of society. A dimension of society where people feel stuck, live their lives in fear, and feel hopeless and scared. Many marginalized clients are hopeless in our legal system without adequate representation.

The one experience that impacted me the most was when I interviewed a client who sought to file for full custody of her three-year-old daughter- her third time within a two-year period. In this case, the daughter experienced physical abuse by her father and stepmom during her weekend visits to their home. Both parents shared partial custody, so the client had no choice but to follow the court orders by sending her daughter to her father's house every other weekend. After conducting a two-hour interview with the client, I realized that while laws are enacted to protect people, some laws are extremely conservative and do quite the opposite. In fact, some laws often protect the abuser, leaving victims traumatized by the inequalities in the laws and court system.

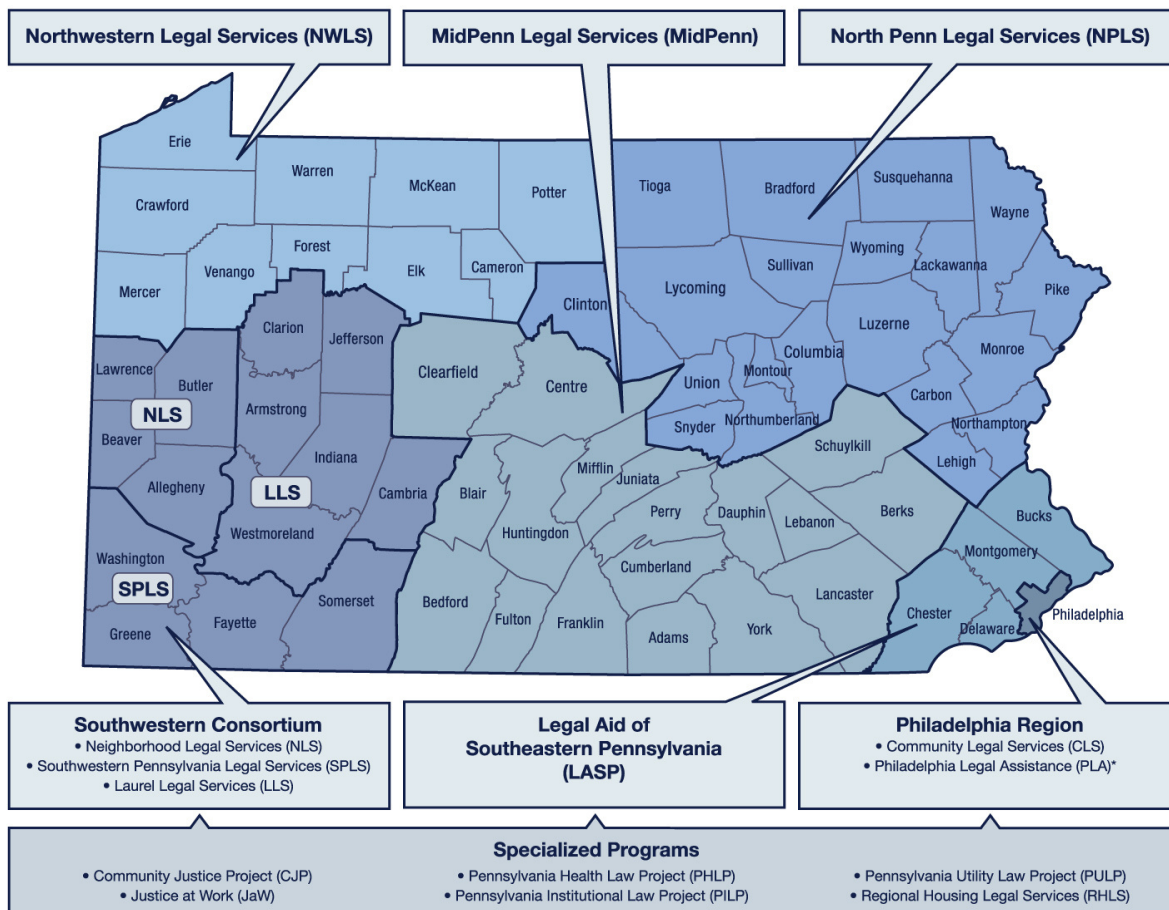
Justice cannot wait. In America, public service is the foundation of fabric that holds America's society together. Public interest attorneys beat their drums with passion, love, and a desire for equality for all who need legal representation. At SPLA, we believe that every person should have fair representation in court regardless of financial ability.

The outcome of any case should not be determined by the ability to afford an attorney. Public interest law is an extremely broad topic with no single definition or practice setting. My time at SPLA reassured me that public service is the best path for me to start my legal career. I can honestly wake up every day excited to do my job because I know that my work will positively impact somebody's life.

My clients opened my eyes to how much of a privilege it is to have legal knowledge. Attorneys and law students are at an advantage over the common person in society because we study and understand the rule of law. Today, some lawyers fall victim to the drum instinct. They become obsessed with the title, money, and fame that comes with the benefits and rewards of being a lawyer. While I understand the fun and excitement of the material rewards, I often remind people that the real reward is being humble while positively impacting people's lives, contributing to society, and making the world a better place.

As an MLK Intern, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to work at such a prestigious law firm that does such important work in the world. As I move forward in my career, I will continue to create my life's blueprint and the legacy for which I want to be remembered. Justice cannot wait. Everybody can be great. Everybody can be a public servant. You do not need to be a lawyer or doctor to be a public servant; all you need is passion and a love for humanity.

PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL AID NETWORK



To learn more about our MLK, Jr. Summer Internship and Fellowship Programs or to donate, please visit our website at www.palegalaid.net/internships-fellowships.

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Funding for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Program is provided by the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, and the generous contributions of private sponsors.

Contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by the law. The official registration and financial information of Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling, toll free within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. EIN #23-1892464. Registration does not imply endorsement.

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