

PILF journal entry
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I spent the summer as an intern with Tacomaprobono, in their Housing Justice Project. Washington State passed a new statute in 2021, requiring courts to appoint counsel at no cost to tenants facing eviction. The lawyers in the HJP are appointed by the state to represent indigent defendants in unlawful detainer (eviction) cases. I worked directly with staff attorneys, conducting client interviews, doing legal research, and drafting motions. I observed the docket almost every day, observing several different commissioners applying the same set of laws. I discovered that the outcome can vary greatly depending on who is on the bench on a given day. This is a new area of law, and the legal aid organizations, the landlord attorneys, and the judges are all duking it out to define the contours of this new statute. I didn't anticipate how messy it would be, but I have to admit I found the chaotic, wrestling-match energy of it all enthralling.

For example, I was lucky enough to assist an attorney in drafting an appellate brief. A judge in a remote county essentially disregarded the statute. To be frank, it was a little shocking. I read the reporter's papers, and the judge pretty much ignored the arguments from our side. The appeal is pending but I think it'll be open-and-shut. It's a chance for the court of appeals to articulate the law clearly, giving the attorneys clear precedent to point to in cases like this.

Something else I found surprising was the seeming lack of effort on the part of the opposing lawyers. My guess is that they're still accustomed to these cases being an easy win. For example, after I drafted my first brief, I woke up the next morning to read the response from the other side. I was terrified, certain that these seasoned lawyers would find the holes in my arguments and rip them wide open. Instead, the reply either sidestepped my arguments entirely or misrepresented them. The writing was also disjunct and hard to follow. I don't say all this to insult these landlords' attorneys (even though, with rare exceptions, I did find their demeanor consistently callous, immature, and cruel) - I'm pointing this out because it was surprising, and because it helped with my imposter syndrome. I mean, if these guys were making a living as attorneys, then surely I can too!

The staff attorneys at Tacomaprobono were wonderful. They put energy into training me, they trusted me with important tasks, and gave me lots of helpful feedback. They were consistently supportive and kind, taking time to develop me as a lawyer and as a human. I connected well with the office culture, and I consider some of the people I worked with to be my friends. I'm excited to continue my work there this fall as an APR Rule 9 intern.