

T.K. Anney

This summer I've had the privilege of interning with Thurston County Volunteer Legal Services (TCVLS). TCVLS contracts with OCLA to provide Right-To-Counsel (RTC) defense to people facing eviction. TCVLS currently has three RTC attorneys on staff. In addition, they also facilitate pro bono legal representation from a number of attorneys who volunteer their time, and they also put on no-cost family law advice clinics twice weekly.

My main role has been supporting the right-to-counsel attorneys. I've worked closely with them, doing legal research, looking into legislative history of statutes, drafting legal documents, and performing client intakes. The attorneys have been so supportive, educating me on how the system works and keeping me abreast of updates in the cases. I've gained a wonderful foundation of landlord-tenant law and overall a significant boost to my fluency in the language of the law in general.

I'm proud to take part in the implementation of Washington's right-to-counsel law, a historic law in the movement for tenant's rights. I know I've been able to help people stay housed. One highlight for me was hearing a staff attorney use my legal research in oral argument. It was so scary! But she ended up convincing the judge (sure, it was only to have a default vacated, which is not a huge hurdle to cross, but hearing my words in court was still a rush!).

The experience has also been a little shocking. It's been a rousing education in what people who have power will try to do when they think they can get away with it. I've witnessed landlords brazenly break the law and engage in all kinds of deception and intimidation tactics to evict tenants. On top of that, I've witnessed judges - whether through ignorance of the law, or indifference to it - evict people illegally. The process of changing the law is a slow one, and - apparently - not everyone jumps on board immediately.

However, because of this experience, I can see that these problems are not insurmountable. I've watched as the staff attorneys and paralegals at TCVLS work diligently to assert the rights of their clients, standing up to the landlord attorneys, and even judges sometimes. It's been an inspiring experience to work alongside these dedicated attorneys.