

David Gary

This summer I have been a Rule 9 intern with the Whatcom County Public Defender's Office, serving their juvenile unit and helping youth and some adult offenders navigate the criminal justice system. This was my first time serving actual incarcerated persons in criminal court and gave me a view into what it is like to be in a court room and a trial attorney.

The experience has been insightful as I was serving in my role as counsel for those charged with misdemeanors, felonies, and sex based offenses. In my role I was covering arraignments, parole hearings, probation violation hearings, and motion hearings. I was also permitted to give counsel to clients by explaining what was going to happen in that day's hearing, explaining what the judge would expect from them during the hearing, and what potential outcomes might be and how we would be advocating for them in the day's hearing. This experience gave me a real life look at what it is like to walk into jail and meet with a client for the first time and give them direct advocacy when they are in crisis. This was a skill that was attempted to be taught in certain classes but real life work is different than a classroom scenario and far more accurate.

I was highly impressed with the attorneys in my office and excited by the opportunities I received in my role as a Rule 9 intern. I mainly worked with the two attorneys who worked in the juvenile unit and the investigator and legal assistant who worked in that area of the law. Both the attorneys I worked with were excellent both in their knowledge of the law and their passion towards helping the youth they were assigned to counsel. I knew that this would be a smaller public defender's office than I had previously worked or interned for, but I was impressed with how tactfully and ardently each attorney took on the seriousness of the cases assigned to them and how knowledgeable each attorney was on the criminal law surrounding each case and how prepared every attorney was to make arguments when appropriate for a case as well as settling a case when there was no good legal argument to be made.

I was taken aback with how demeaning criminal justice can be towards certain defendants caught in the system, especially in the juvenile context. In Whatcom County, there are fewer community resources available for the community than in larger counties, and police were being called, and children arrested for family disturbances that would have been sanctioned differently in other geographic regions. When working to get a youth released from custody, we would receive a daily report on whether a juvenile was arrested in the previous 24 hours. We would then wait for a police report to be distributed to us and see the juvenile in youth detention. The police reports would often be falsified or exaggerated. We would then venture to the probation office to see if they wanted any special conditions before we went in front of the judge to make our case. We were typically able to get the youth out of detention at this time.

Overall the experience with Whatcom County Public Defender's Office was a strong one. I learned a lot about criminal defense and the challenges surrounding the work. It was a powerful undertaking and on I am proud to have taken on an experience I can be proud of.