

## **Stephanie A. Lowry**

This summer, I took the leap of faith necessary to move out to Richmond, VA for the entire summer to intern at the Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Eastern District of Virginia. I was nervous, but I was also confident that at the end of the summer I would know if public defense was a career path I could reasonably see myself pursuing following graduation. It had always been a dream, but now I was really going to see.

The FPD Office was excited to have interns and within the first week of my internship I was certified with my 3rd Year Practice Certificate and I was writing motions and briefs that were filed in the Eastern District of Virginia. The work I primarily engaged in included writing legal motions on evidence suppression, motions on competence, and positions on sentencing. I, along with my fellow interns, also engaged in course work that simulated trial work and we participated in an exchange program with interns from the state public defender office so that we could see a variety of cases, trials, and judges in the region.

Uniquely, even though I am a rising 3L, this was my first legal internship in person since I started law school. I was pretty nervous about the office dynamics, how I would navigate working with the variety of attorneys, and how the interns would mesh together. Thankfully, I found my two supervisors to be very accommodating and supportive of my interests and other endeavors I was engaged in. I was also thrilled to be in an active environment where there was always something interesting to see at court, happens going on around the office, and time to connect with peers from other law schools.

While I found the courts in Virginia to be very different than my legal experiences in Seattle, I was encouraged to speak the judges here and to learn about their specific styles. So much of public defense, and how successful you are in your motions and arguments really depends on the way you frame your facts. How you do that can largely depend on who will listen to those facts. Sentencing positions that I wrote often fared much better with judges who I knew better and could tailor the experience of our client in a way that was impactful and meaningful to that specific judge. While I am not sure where I will end up after graduation, I am thankful to also have a legal community here in Richmond, VA.

While the summer was hot (every day in the 90s) and the hours were long, I am thankful that I was presented with this opportunity. I have learned from some of the greatest public defenders I believe exist in the federal world. They are passionate, kind, and driven by values which allow them to zealously advocate for their client's best interests on a daily basis. I have seen them tired, underappreciated, and juggling a large case load, but the things I have learned from them regarding how to prioritize each client, serve their needs, and stand in the gap to ensure they are treated fairly by an unjust system will forever shape the way I approach public defense. I am very thankful for the Stevens Fellowship, Seattle U School of Law, and the Public Interest Law Foundation for their support and financial assistance that permitted me to have this fantastic experience. I highly encourage anyone interested to consider an internship with the FPD.