

## Joseph Phillippi

This summer, I have had the privilege of working as a legal intern at the Unemployment Law Project (ULP). With offices in both Seattle and Spokane, ULP has been providing free services to individuals struggling to navigate legal challenges to their eligibility to receive or retain unemployment benefits for nearly four decades – primarily offering representation at administrative hearings, legal advice to individuals representing themselves, or referrals to other legal services. While the small size of ULP's downtown headquarters and the lingering shadow of Covid have rendered this a remote internship, I have had the pleasure of getting to know folks at both offices through our multiple weekly Zoom meetings, and got to spend a day in-person with everyone at the Seattle office.

After just two days of training, I was thrown right into intake duty, where the interns were needed most. Typically 2-3 times a day, I conducted intake interviews over the phone with claimants who were preparing for an administrative hearing regarding a decision by the Employment Security Department (ESD) about their unemployment benefits that either they or their former employer had appealed. After observing some of the hearings our staff attorneys argued at, I started to learn what issues and details in an individual's case were most likely to be significant at a hearing, and could incorporate that knowledge into more efficient listening and questioning during intakes. Besides learning about the legal issues themselves, these intakes have provided some invaluable experience in showing compassion and understanding for claimants in trying circumstances, practicing patience and calmness with difficult individuals, and minding professional responsibilities and ethics with people looking for advice or predictions about their case on the spot, even after I have told them I am not a lawyer and do not have many answers to offer.

In addition to the steady stream of intakes I have conducted so far, I have also gotten some work as a hearing representative on cases that ULP has decided to take and doing research towards an appellate brief that I am currently working on for submission in the Fall. In taking on cases, there are several vital steps in the preparation process: first is becoming intimately familiar with the documents in the client's exhibits packet; then, it is usually necessary to have multiple pre-hearing conferences over the phone to nail down the details of the individual's story and the questions that need to be asked to get all the significant details into the record; and, in between these calls, there is research to be done in the RCW, Washington Administrative Code, and controlling administrative decision caselaw, in order to establish the most compelling legal theories to present at the hearing. I argued and won my first hearing in the middle of July and am finishing preparations for another on August 2nd. Although I have already surpassed the required internship hours and will be wrapping up my official internship schedule this week, my plan is to remain working with ULP in a voluntary capacity, both to continue writing the appellate brief due in September and to take on cases periodically to gain more experience arguing at hearings.

I have had my eye on this internship since Cindy Yeung mentioned it to me back in September of 2021, after my application to become an ATJI First-year Fellow was accepted. It has been

everything I could have asked for and more from a first step into the legal career field, and I am so glad that the engrossing, important, and service-oriented work I get to do with ULP will not end when this summer break does!