

Maddy Powers

This summer I had the privilege of working with many skilled and passionate attorneys at the Habeas Corpus Resource Center (HCRC) in San Francisco. HCRC is a part of the judicial branch of California that represents indigent men and women who have been sentenced to death in their post-conviction habeas matters. In this position, I learned a tremendous amount about the post-conviction habeas process within the extremely specialized area of capital defense. I cannot stress how valuable this experience has been as someone who has a particular passion for death penalty defense.

The internship started off with a two week-long training with other defense-minded organizations in California. The training covered areas such as capital trials, appeals, and habeas proceedings, forensic evidence, the place and culture of death row, mitigation evidence, and common defenses in capital cases such as *Batson*, *Atkins*, and ineffective assistance of counsel claims. Because the habeas process is not widely taught in law schools, it was extremely useful and interesting to hear more about this complex area of law. Furthermore, many experienced post-conviction habeas and appellate lawyers spoke about their experiences litigating claims in court, strategic decision making in capital cases, and creative defense strategies they have employed throughout their careers. It was incredibly inspiring to see so many people who have fought tirelessly for their clients' lives.

I worked on several research and writing projects on multiple case teams this summer. Each project was managed by a different supervisor. I wrote memoranda on the probability of succeeding in getting post-conviction relief by applying different constitutional arguments and retroactive application of new laws. These projects involved reviewing extensive trial and appellate court records, researching recent case law, and applying case law to the facts of the case. I also wrote motions for an evidentiary hearings in state court. This involved reviewing expert declarations, facts of the case, and applying the relevant law to the facts. Lastly, I completed a research project on prosecutorial misconduct and ineffective assistance of counsel claims in preparation for an evidentiary hearing. This involved reviewing trial and appellate court records and applying them to recent case law on similar claims.

For each project, I became a temporary member on each case team, which consisted of several lawyers, paralegals, and investigators. I attended weekly meetings wherein the teams would check in on the status of the case, share new information, discuss strategy, and update one another on any contact with the client. It was wonderful to be working as part of a team united under the common goal of advocating for one person. Each team seemed to have a special bond that I have never before witnessed in the legal field. Though much of the staff was working remotely throughout my time at HCRC, I felt a true sense of community in the office.

I am leaving this experience with a particular passion for death penalty defense. Though it is a difficult, complex, and emotionally demanding area of law, I feel that I have found an environment that shares my values in the capital defense community. Most of all, I am impressed by how individualistic and client-centered the work at HCRC is. Capital habeas work

is all about telling a whole and complete story: a story that involves a person's upbringing, social dynamics, challenges they have faced, medical and mental health histories, and any other factors that help us to better understand what led an individual to the crime in question. HCRC attorneys work tirelessly to ensure that their clients have an opportunity to be heard and to tell their truth. Most importantly, HCRC attorneys urge courts to recognize the humanity in their clients. It was an honor to work with HCRC this summer and I hope to have many more experiences in capital defense work.