

Yoselyn Roman-Rodriguez

This summer, I had the opportunity to work for the Forth Judicial District of Colorado. I clerked there for the Honorable Judge Lin Billings-Vela, the presiding juvenile law judge, and the Honorable Judge Robin Chitum. Both judges had a diverse docket that dealt with criminal and juvenile matters.

As the presiding juvenile law judge, Judge Billings-Vela was responsible for transfer hearings for juveniles who committed serious felonies. I was exposed for the first time to observing how Colorado judges decide whether a juvenile should be charged as an adult. I was also exposed to re-sentencing hearings of juveniles who violated their original plea agreements. Furthermore, I could see all the involved parties of a juvenile case committed to helping rehabilitate juveniles.

Clerking for district judges with diverse dockets allowed me to see different cases ranging from dependency and neglect cases to sentencing and jury trials. For Judge Billings-Vela, her criminal docket days were on Mondays. On Mondays, I would come in and see all the criminal matters come before the court. I appreciated being in the courtroom as much as I was because, as a first-generation Latina and daughter of immigrants, I would see how my parents were terrified of going to court when they received a traffic infraction. Being present and attending different types of hearings made the courtroom less intimidating. I also oversaw and assisted the jury for jury trials. I enjoyed seeing how the attorneys on each side would narrow down from a massive pool of jurors to only twelve jurors.

I was tasked with conducting due diligence on several cases, writing various legal memos, and legal research. I was challenged to work efficiently while maintaining a fast pace. However, my judges still found the time in their busy schedules to check in with me regularly and to get to know me. I appreciated learning how relatable my judges were and our similar interests. Both judges always offered extensive feedback and were available to provide guidance.

While I mainly worked alongside Judge Billings-Vela and Judge Chitum, I also had the opportunity to meet several of the judges who also work for the Fourth District. I was able to sit in hearings with other judges that dealt with domestic relations or civil law. Seeing different areas of the law was unique because I was not confined to only juvenile or criminal law. Additionally, as a part of the program, I was able to meet the Colorado Supreme Court Justices and had a visit to the coroner's office.

I am incredibly honored and grateful for my opportunity this summer and all I learned. I refined my legal writing skills and learned to be a more efficient researcher. Having tight deadlines pushed me to trust my judgment and to ask questions when I was not sure of something. I learned the value of having open communication to ensure that I was meeting the expectations of my judges. I was proud to represent my community as the only Latina hired for the summer term.