

Brianne Zamora

This summer, I worked as a legal intern with the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington's (ACLU-WA) legal department. The ACLU-WA ensures that every Washingtonian's civil rights and civil liberties are protected, upheld, and respected. Specifically, the legal department supports the organization through various legal functions such as impact litigation, advocacy, and amicus briefs. My time with the ACLU-WA has been an invaluable experience that allowed me to not only expand upon my legal skills but also support communities. I have four examples that illustrates my internship experience.

First, the ACLU-WA has provided me with the necessary litigation exposure to debunk my belief that I would not thrive in litigation. I entered law school with a mindset that dismissed litigation as a legal career pathway, because I felt I lacked the skills and characteristics to be a litigator. However, I challenged this belief; I sought an internship with an organization, like the ACLU-WA, that advocates for the rights of people through impact litigation. Thankfully, my internship experience debunked this dismissive mindset. I learned that most of the work in civil litigation takes place outside of court through legal research, writing and court filings. Moreover, litigation involves creativity in crafting compelling arguments; I discovered that I enjoyed this aspect. Ultimately, the ACLU-WA has ignited this interest in litigation, which I hope to cultivate during law school.

Second, the ACLU-WA has allowed me to witness the ACLU's prominence as a respected organization in this country. During my internship, the Supreme Court overturned Roe and Casey. As lawyers and advocates, we understand the implications and harm this would cause to people. However, during a significant moment in our nation's history, I am thankful to be in a space, like the ACLU-WA, that continues to fight and be in solidarity. Despite the moments of anger and hurt, it was refreshing to see the fighting spirit of ACLU national and its affiliates stand up against these injustices by engaging in litigation work across the country. Overall, I saw the importance of coalition building to ensure a united front in fighting against injustices.

Third, the ACLU-WA's assignments have enabled me to collaborate with multiple colleagues. One of my assignments was to collaborate with a cooperating attorney from another firm to conduct research for an amicus brief; specifically, my research focused on the implications of a denial of immigration naturalization because of the federal and state's contradicting stance on marijuana legalization. Furthermore, I collaborated with a staff attorney to investigate a religious freedom complaint in county jail. As a result of our investigation, I wrote an advocacy letter on behalf of the inmates to advocate for their right to religious food items and staff training. Additionally, I assisted a team on an amicus brief related to post-Blake financial relief, specifically arguing the challenges of navigating the court as a pro se litigant. All in all, I witnessed the importance of collaboration and teamwork to advocate for a more just world.

Fourth, I explored various legal issues regarding racial and economic justice, where I engaged in critical research and analysis. Specifically, a notable assignment was to research whether the ACLU-WA could challenge a county's legal financial obligation (LFO) system as discriminatory

under the Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD). Moreover, I researched whether suspending a driver's license due to a person's inability to pay a fine constitutes an excessive fine. Furthermore, I explored whether poverty should be considered a semi-suspect class that warrants heightened judicial scrutiny for equal protection analysis. The time I spent conducting research and providing analysis has been an incredible experience. I utilized my legal training and skills to contribute to the ACLU-WA's work and for society in a meaningful way. Finally, I learned that many of the issues that ACLU-WA requires creativity in constructing novel arguments to advocate for the rights of people.

In closing, I am thankful for the generous PILF grant that has given me the capacity to work with ACLU-WA. This internship has been a memorable experience in cultivating my legal knowledge and training. The skills, insight, and mentorship I received from the ACLU-WA have affirmed why I pursued a legal degree.