



"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

*Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963*

Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Summer Internship and Fellowship Program

Pennsylvania  
**Legal Aid** Network, Inc.

# THE DRUM MAJOR

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## Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Interns

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.  
Louise Brookins Building  
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Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17101

July 29, 2015

To the 2015 Martin Luther King, Jr. Interns:

We are pleased to present you with the 2015 edition of **THE DRUM MAJOR**, which is a small token of appreciation for your efforts this summer.

Through your work during the past ten weeks, you have touched the lives of many clients who have nowhere else to turn. You learned how to use your skills to make equal justice a reality.

For this, we thank you. Wherever your paths may lead you, we hope that your experience here will be an inspiration and a reminder of how you can make a difference.

Very Truly Yours,



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## **Giving Voices to the Unheard**

My name is Alonso Arguedas, and I am a bilingual, first generation Latino-American. My parents came to this nation as immigrants in 1988 with my two older siblings, Alex and Gaby. They came to this nation with a few thousand dollars and the hope of a better future. Their decision to move to this nation forced our family to grow up in a complex, at times confusing, environment. When I went to school, it was American culture and English, but when I came home, it was traditional Latino culture where my parents spoke only Spanish. This environment allowed me to maintain my Latino culture and fluency in Spanish, while developing advanced proficiency in English. Our story is one of many immigrants, but it is unique in its own way. My sister, Gaby, was born with spina bifida, so she was handicapped from birth. This was extremely difficult for our family, and it made life that much more difficult. These complexities played monumental roles in shaping my identity. My sister played a monumental role in my life. The situations I faced growing up allowed me to develop a sense of strong identity, resilience and perseverance. Consequently, throughout the course of my life, my siblings and household environment have profoundly influenced my decision to pursue a career in public interest.

When I was seven years old, my older sister, Gaby, in addition to having spina bifida, was diagnosed with lupus, which is a devastating autoimmune disease. This

was overwhelmingly traumatic for my family and it eventually played a monumental role in shaping my decision for law school. Growing up, Gaby was my best friend and role model. From the constant surgeries to her painful medical tests, she showed me the definition of strength. No matter how difficult life became, Gaby always had a smile on her face. She was always willing to listen to my problems despite the fact that her problems were far worse. She encouraged and supported me, but most importantly, she taught me how to dream. It was these experiences that shaped my tenacity to reach out and help others. I grew up in an environment where I saw low-income people, such as my family, struggle not only with acceptance but to survive in a new nation that came with language barriers and multiple difficulties.

Because of these experiences, I entered the Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) internship with an excited, vigorous fire to do my best and help in any way possible. With my first year of law school out of the way, I knew I had some knowledge and connections to people who have the skillset to provide information that can change lives.

When I began work at Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA), I brought my skillset to the job and made an impact from the day I started. The first day of work, I experienced one of the most humbling moments of my life. I went with one of my supervising attorneys, Lany Villalobos, to the Mexican Consulate located in Center City Philadelphia. We went there to provide those waiting with low-income taxpayer information and how to obtain valid Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers

(ITIN). ITIN numbers are numbers similar to social security numbers; however they are not related to citizenship. They allow illegal immigrants to file their taxes without jeopardizing their immigration status. ITIN has various benefits such as:

- Making sure the taxpayer does not get audited and deported;
- Builds reputation of responsibility for the taxpayer; and
- Shows the government that you have tried to be a law abiding member of society for future attempts to become a citizen of the United States.

During the speech, about 30 to 40 people were captivated by Lany Villalobos' presentation. It was obvious that she was providing information that was important in some form to the people waiting in the Mexican Consulate. Afterwards, Lany and I waited in the corner of the room for people to come ask questions. Various people came to ask questions ranging from how to settle IRS disputes to how to obtain an ITIN. It was so powerful because it showed that there are so many illegal immigrants that want to pay taxes and be productive members of this nation but are scared to file because of their immigration problems. However, the rewarding part was once we found out their situation, we were able to provide them with contact information to free legal clinics that can help with immigration problems as well as so many other problems this demographic faces. The next week, I gave the speech, and the crowd respected that I was completely fluent in Spanish and that I was there to help. It was nerve-wracking, but it was one of the most powerful experiences of my life.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." From a young age, I have been exposed to unique experiences that have given me a different perspective on life. I understand what it is like to live in a home where your family feels defenseless and powerless. However, the most important thing I have learned so far is that there are countless talented, dedicated, and amazing attorneys out there to help people like my family and families that feel the same type of powerlessness. The MLK program has allowed me to see how change is made first hand, and it has shown me that my passion is to help people. The MLK program showed me that I want to dedicate my life to the long struggle towards justice.

## Chance

The world we live in is unfair. No two individuals are born into the world with the same opportunities and support. No two individuals will be given the same chances to succeed or to better themselves throughout their lives. This summer, working with the Community Justice Project (CJP), I have learned the importance of giving every person a chance.

CJP serves underrepresented workers in issues of all stripes including immigration matters, overtime and wage concerns, and handling class actions. CJP provides services to those whose voices always seem to ring the softest in society. Our clients are good people trying to give themselves or their community a chance, but so often, employers, government agencies, and other organizations find it simpler to turn their attention away from the plight of these people.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to this phenomenon as the “drum major instinct,” the compulsion to feel accomplished in life and be recognized. Speaking for the ages, Dr. King told his audience that this instinct could be harnessed in many harmful ways. This instinct can manifest in individuals who ignore those around them in the hopes that it will improve their standing. He told of people buying luxuries they could not afford and of great pride. These individuals begin to stop caring about the



problems of those around them and lose focus on their community. It is an all too real fact of life that this instinct becomes a source of oppression.

But Dr. King also talked about another way to embrace the drum major instinct. He talked of using that primal push towards greatness to make ourselves the most compassionate, most caring, and most helpful individuals we can. There is a greatness to being a part of a community and to improving that community. By giving others a chance, we become part of something that is far larger and greater than anything we could accomplish alone. This summer, I have prided myself on helping others. I have found joy and satisfaction fighting to give members of my community a real chance. I have begun to hone that instinct in a way that supports those around me. I am using that instinct, that want to be the best and to be part of something greater, to give people a chance at making a better life for themselves.

I am learning the true value of a chance. For some, that chance means a new home or keeping an old one. For others, it means the ability to provide for their family. For others still, it is a reflection of the hard work they put in every day. All they ask for is a chance, a chance to be respected and encouraged. For those who have fallen on hard times, a chance means so many things. It means being heard. It is a chance to live a better life and to grow. These chances make our community better. These chances give people hope and bring out the best in all of us.

Helping others and giving them a chance serves to help those people embrace their own drum major instinct in a positive way. These people come to CJP for help

because they have been dealt with unfairly. Many are victims of the drum major instinct gone awry by individuals or groups of people who feel they are more important and therefore that others are lesser. One of the biggest strengths of CJP is the friendliness and support offered by every single person who works there. It helps to remind clients that there are those who promote the best ideals of the drum major instinct, that we gain true recognition from building our communities up rather than tearing them down, and that there will always be someone who will advocate on their behalf. These are the examples Dr. King wanted his listeners to project through the drum major instinct and organizations like CJP spread that vision to their communities all across the country.

The world we live in is unfair, but this is also what makes us unique. We should not shy away from our instincts. Instead, we should embrace the chance to be unique and to use that to make our community better. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without the chances that I have been given. I want to use my experience and my skills to return the favor by giving my community a chance to be the most compassionate and strongest collective that it can be. That all starts by giving others a chance.

My summer internship at the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project (PILP) was the most fulfilling job experience I have ever had. The internship gave me the opportunity to work with inmates who have had their civil rights violated while in prison. PILP has helped me realize that inmates face substantial injustice daily, in which society ignores. For example, I worked on a class action lawsuit to prohibit the ‘One Good Eye’ policy which was enacted by the Pennsylvania Prison System. The policy forbids inmates eye surgery if they currently have another eye that functions properly. I read several letters from inmates who stated they were suffering from glaucoma or some other medical condition but were denied treatment because of this policy. Also, I went to visit a prison to speak with male inmates regarding prison conditions. An inmate described his living conditions as “deprivation of basic human necessities.” He stated that he shared an overcrowded cell with two other inmates, where they are locked in the cell twenty-three hours daily, served hot food cold daily, mice roaming in cells during the night, and having to choose between showering and making phone calls to family because of inadequate time allotted. What stood out most for me was when I briefly spoke with a former inmate newly released from prison. He stated he was released after nearly thirty years in prison without any money or a place to go and suffered from several medical conditions. He begged people on the street for change to make the phone call to PILP for help. My heart fluttered with pain because I could not fathom such injustice.

In such short time, I came to understand how difficult it could be for inmates before and after incarceration. Most inmates come from disadvantaged backgrounds that lead to their incarceration and, afterwards, face difficulty finding stability after their release from prison. Without the help from PILP and other non-profit organizations, these individuals would be abandoned and left helpless. Dr. King stated that he would like to be judged not by the color of his skin, but by the content of his character. I believe inmates and former inmates face the same dilemma. Society makes judgments against these individuals not by the color of their skin but because of the wrongs they committed against society and are unwilling to forgive or give them a second chance in life. In most cases, we forget that these individuals made mistakes or were faced with obstacles that put them at a disadvantage in life. Working for PILP was an eye-opening experience and has been extremely valuable. It has solidified my desire to pursue a career in helping the poor and minorities alike that suffer injustice.

Furthermore, I also learned a substantial amount about Eighth Amendment rights and the legal issues affecting prisoners daily. Moreover, I enjoyed the work atmosphere, supervising attorneys, colleagues, and the assignments. I worked on a variety of other projects from statistical data research and legal research on significant issues. The attorneys were very accessible and gave in-depth and helpful feedback on all assignments. I would recommend PLAN to any law student hoping to pursue a career in public interest – or any student who just wants to see how the study of law can help people in need. My internship not only helped me become more effective in my

legal career, but also I learned how to be a better advocate for people that cannot speak or stand up for themselves.

I wanted to intern at MidPenn Legal Services (MPLS) because it was an opportunity to give back to the community where I grew up. When I started the internship, I had some knowledge of difficulties that people face everyday. However, it wasn't until I started assisting the wonderful attorneys at MPLS that I realized the depth of the legal issues that many face in the community. I was proud and excited to do whatever it took to help our clients, who more than anything, needed a listening ear. The internship offered me the opportunity to assist in resolving issues that are crucial to the client's livelihood.

In particular, I remember a mother who sought out our service after battling drug addiction and being incarcerated. She wanted us to help her get visitation of her only daughter who was in her father's custody. The father refused to allow the mother visitation of any kind, even though the mother was working and attending drug counseling each week. In tears, the mother explained that her main motivation for overcoming her drug usage was her daughter. She wanted a second chance to be the mother she knew she could be. She wanted us to help her get that chance. Fortunately, she did get a second chance to be a mother through an agreement we reached at a conciliation conference.

Another case involved a 55-year-old woman who worked as a residential aide most of her life. She was tasked with the important duty of caring for the elderly.

Although she enjoyed her job and took pride in what she did, she was forced to quit after a year of working without any health insurance. Her employer provided health insurance for all of its employees except her. She requested health insurance several times but to no avail. Soon after, she came to our office seeking representation as her employer denied her unemployment compensation claim. We were able to represent her at the hearing but unsuccessful in the claim. However, the client was grateful that she had the opportunity to explain her side of the story. And we are now in the process of appealing the referee's decision.

Through this internship, I was able to utilize my trial advocacy and communication skills. I had to learn when to interject on behalf of my client and when to just listen and offer words of support. I was also able to expand upon my research and writing skills and gain a better understanding of the process involved throughout the lifespan of a case. More importantly, interning for MPLS helped me realize that the true reward in having a legal education is using my knowledge to assist those in need.

Dr. Martin Luther King once said, "Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a better person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in." Through this internship, I was able to live up to the words of Dr. King.

**“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”**

**- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Throughout my education, I’ve drawn inspiration from Martin Luther King, Jr.’s lifelong commitment to service and the betterment of mankind. My attentiveness to the needs of underserved communities stems from my upbringing as well as my status as a minority. As a minority student from a fairly privileged background, I’ve always felt a duty to uplift those who may not be in a position to lift themselves. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship Program, aimed at providing access to justice for all individuals regardless of their ability to pay, caught my interest immediately.

My decision to become a lawyer was a result of an internship I had as an undergraduate. I interned at Neighborhood Legal Services Association (NLSA). I specialized in drafting criminal expungement petitions. I had clients who made questionable decisions in their youth, but needed clean slates in order to get jobs. I had clients who were wrongfully accused and needed the errors erased to obtain public housing. I was exposed to so many people who were grateful that I was in the position to help them improve their current situations. Lawyers have reputations for being calculating and cold. However, after my experience, my view of the profession was permanently transformed. Every lawyer I assisted provided valuable life-altering



services. Last spring, I was ecstatic when I learned that I would be able to return to my old stomping grounds.

My experience this summer put Dr. King's quote into perspective for me. Our lives are fulfilled through service and lifting up others. The practice of law is not often thought of as a service, but practicing within legal aid makes that very sentiment abundantly clear. When I learned that I would be handling landlord tenant disputes, I was both nervous and thrilled by the idea of practicing in a new area and gaining firsthand litigation experience as a certified legal intern. This summer has provided no shortage of learning experiences and heartwarming victories (no matter how small). Whether I advised a client about his rights regarding a security deposit or got a judgment granting a family possession of their rental home, I truly felt like I was doing something for others. Even at times when I didn't feel very self-assured or successful, my clients were always grateful and confident in my abilities. That sort of positive reinforcement and gratitude provided just as much fulfillment as the more obvious learning experiences and heartwarming victories.

Dr. King's life was his message; he lived to make things better for others. My experience at NLSA this summer has reaffirmed my commitment to do the same.

In his “Drum Major Instinct” sermon, delivered on February 4, 1968, the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to his congregation about an innate drive that we all have to be great. He spoke about this instinct that we all share to be recognized and praised for our positive attributes, accomplishments, and good deeds. At first, he seems to suggest that we should rebuke this instinct, which he says when unchecked can become “dangerous” due to the negative effect it can have on ones personality. However, towards the end of his sermon, he redeems the drum major instinct by informing his audience that it can be helpful when properly harnessed. He tells his congregation that when one’s achievements are measured in service to others, this instinct can be used to attain true greatness.

When I consider my ongoing journey to reach my professional goals as an attorney this message hits home. My greatest concern, as I pursue a career as an attorney, is not how I can land the highest paying job to put myself in a position to buy the biggest house, or the nicest car. My greatest concern is what I can do both as a law student and future attorney to have the biggest positive impact on the most people that I possibly can. This passion for using my skills to serve others is what drew me to public interest law, legal services in particular.

There are many ways for a lawyer to serve and have a positive impact. Whether insuring that a large company remains in compliance with government regulations or

drafting a will for a wealthy businesswoman, each day lawyers across the country make a positive impact in their clients lives by guiding them through the legal system. The reason I plan to focus on serving those who are financially disadvantaged is because of the special impact that I can have as an advocate for their interests.

When I first began considering law school, I saw it as an opportunity for personal advancement - a chance to make big bucks and gain social standing. However, it wasn't long before my natural desire to help others led me towards public interest. As I progressed through my first year of law school, I became increasingly intrigued by the possibility of using my newly acquired skills to help the most vulnerable. By the end of my first legal internship at the Homeless Advocacy Project, I was positive that I wanted to pursue a career advocating for indigent clients in civil matters. This led me to my current internship at Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania's (LASP) Norristown office.

As the start date for my ten-week stint at LASP approached, I was anxious about how my experience might grow and shape my desire to advocate on behalf of indigent clients. I can happily say my experience was truly educational and illuminating. I gained even more insight into how critical legal services are for those who are economically disadvantaged. By working with economically disadvantaged clients facing a wide spectrum of legal issues, I was able to gain an appreciation for the wide reaching impact that legal service providers can have in their lives. Over the course of the summer, I became aware of the many circumstances that can leave financially

disadvantaged individuals feeling trapped and hopeless when faced with complicated legal problems. Whether they were considering bankruptcy, facing foreclosure or eviction, or seeking legal protection from an abusive paramour, the people who came to LASP saw us as the last defense between them and personal catastrophe. I will not soon forget the desperation that I witnessed on many of their faces as they came in seeking legal advocates as well as the relief that they expressed when we were able to offer them help. Even when we were only able to provide them with advice, the appreciation that they conveyed further convinced me of the significance of our service. These experiences reassured me of the importance of the work that legal service organizations perform each day for economically disadvantaged persons across our state.

Even as I completed routine research assignments, I could visualize the potential impact of my efforts. Far from busy work, these assignments often pertained to the circumstances of particular clients. Unlike the research assignments that one is likely to receive as an intern at a private law firm, the research that I conducted was critical to our attorneys' effective advocacy on behalf of a real clients. One assignment I was given pertained to a client who was considering filing for Chapter 7 bankruptcy but was concerned that she might lose her car in the process. My research focused on what she could do to ensure that she would be able to keep her car while also shedding the overwhelming debt hanging over her head. Assignments such as these made my work seem unusually personal yet individually rewarding. It was invigorating to know that I had the opportunity to make an enormous difference in someone else's life through the

completion of a task often completed by summer interns only to sit on a supervising attorney's desk collecting dust.

My time at LASP has demonstrated to me the message behind Dr. King's "Drum Major Instinct" sermon. As the summer winds down and I reflect on my overall experience, I feel truly blessed. As grateful as the clients at LASP were for the services I was able to provide, they had no idea how grateful I was for the opportunity to serve them. Knowing the difference that I was making in their lives and their gratitude made my work feel immensely fulfilling. I realize that the satisfaction that I will take away from this experience is a result of my drum major instinct. The impact that I made and the recognition that I received made me feel as though I was achieving great things. I have been enlightened to the fact that we all have a drum major instinct. If we do not harness it properly, it can become personally and socially destructive. However, if we make our mission serving others, we can use this instinct to forever touch the lives of those around us, and in the process we just might obtain true greatness.

When my classmates from Penn State Law ask me what I'm doing this summer, I constantly find myself giving them an explanation that is more complicated than needed but I tend to think some context is important. I usually start by talking about Gideon and Miranda rights because those topics are easy reference points when discussing the right to counsel. But as many of them know, that right is restricted to criminal matters. I then follow with an illustration about a scenario during which the assistance of a lawyer may be necessary to ensure fairness. One illustration that I use frequently is a hypothetical story of a mother who flees a violent environment created by her significant other but needs representation as she seeks to retain custody of her children. In that hypothetical, the woman may be at a disadvantage in a legal proceeding against her former partner because of financial factors or domestic violence. Another illustration is a hypothetical, yet all too common story, of a family who falls behind on their rent and needs representation to remain in their home. Often times, these tenants can work out deals with their landlords if they know their rights. But without legal aid, they may end up without a home.

It is clear how more popular legal institutions, like public defender offices, protect fairness in the legal system. However, some fail to realize that the work done by legal aid lawyers is just as essential. This summer, I had the opportunity to see firsthand how poverty can affect a person's access to their rights in the legal system. To ensure

fairness in our country, people need a degree of access to legal representation against landlords, abusive spouses, and aggressive creditors in the same way they need protection in criminal matters. Often times, at the conclusion of my lengthy answer, I am met with disbelief. Many people, even aspiring law students, are unaware of this need and service.

One of the most meaningful moments of my summer may have been one of my quietest. Early in the summer, my managing attorney handed me file of an elderly man living in an assisted living facility. After assisting this client with a bankruptcy, we traveled to his facility to meet him in person to help him with a power of attorney. It was then that I saw the man for the first time and began to realize how important our work was in the world. This man, who was reaching the end of his life and who had outlived most of his loved ones, would likely never leave his facility. He was, quite literally, one of the most vulnerable people in our community. With no place else to turn, he was able to turn to us and that speaks to the necessity of legal aid work.

When I traveled back to our local office from the assisted living facility, I thought about how profoundly sad the entire afternoon had been. No one wants to spend their last days in a lonely facility, far away from loved ones. But while much of society may have forgotten him, the institution of legal aid had not. I will never forget all of the things that I have taken from this experience. The Bethlehem Office of North Penn Legal Services (NPLS) is filled with talented lawyers who used this summer to contribute to my legal education. I thank the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network for the Martin Luther

King, Jr. Internship Program and the opportunity to learn about the great work of the legal aid community.



### **The Same Boat**

**“We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now.”**

**-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

This quote typically refers to how different groups of people arrived in the United States through slave ships and other immigration passages. When I read this quote, I immediately thought about the clients I represented this summer from all over the world. While they were from different countries, they all seemed to be struggling with the same problem-poverty in America. As I worked with these clients throughout the summer, I felt like their struggle became my own. I was fighting for their access to food, shelter, and medical services. Although, I can never really say that I am in the “same boat” as most of my clients, I felt that at least for this summer, I was able to experience how hard life could be without access to fundamental human needs.

After working for a legal aid office last summer and during the school year, I felt extremely confident in my skills and didn't expect to encounter many challenges. I thought that I had seen and heard it all, and I was fully mentally and emotionally prepared for my work this summer. After my first week at Community Legal Services (CLS), I realized that I was completely wrong. Each day I was faced with a new client and a new story of poverty, depression, homelessness, hopelessness, and injustice. I was

not prepared for the emotional toll of working with these issues. I was not prepared for the amount of obstacles and challenges I would face in solving a seemingly simple issue. I was not prepared for the personal frustration and anger I felt for clients that had been denied services for so long, simply because they did not have the resources to seek help.

Last summer, all of my client interaction occurred via the telephone. This summer, I met clients face to face and thus, I could see all of the pain they had endured. We came from different walks of life, yet every client I met with, I felt like their story became my own. When I came to the office at 9:00 am to the time I left at 5:00 pm, I almost felt like I was in the same boat as them. I know that, in reality, this wasn't the case, but the emotional baggage that unloaded onto me at each client meeting made me empathize with their situations.

One of the first assignments I had at CLS was observing the intake process. I listened to the stories of the clients and watched, amazed, at how the paralegals and attorneys worked to solve the issues. They were able to put bits and pieces of the clients' stories together to figure out why they were denied benefits, what happened to the applications they submitted etc. Some of the problems were solved immediately, which left the clients with a sense of hope. However, there were always the more complicated matters that took weeks of advocacy and effort. These cases are the ones I remember the most and advocating for their rights became my own personal fight.

My supervisor was Maripat Pileggi. Many of the cases she works on involve Emergency Medical Assistance (EMA). EMA is available to "immigrants who meet the

criteria for medical assistance but who would be denied solely because of immigration status.<sup>1</sup> To obtain EMA, the individual must prove that they have a serious medical condition with acute symptoms. I work with many of these individuals during the summer. I worked with one client who had two very sick children that were in constant pain. Obtaining EMA requires frequent outreach to doctor's offices on behalf of the clients and even participating in hearings. I felt so emotionally invested in these cases. Each time a doctor didn't respond to my call or I couldn't get in touch with an office, I felt like my client's lives were on the line.

I also got the opportunity to visit the Chintatown Clinic. At the clinic, immigrants from multiple countries across Asia came for medical help. CLS works at the clinic to inform these individuals of their legal rights. Seeing all of these sick people without insurance, transportation, food, and other basic necessities was overwhelming. I remember having a client at the clinic who was in need of EMA for a hernia surgery. We desperately wanted to help him; however, he didn't want our services. He said that as an undocumented person he had already taken enough from America and didn't want to take anything more. He kept saying that he didn't want to waste our time or our resources. Maripat and I begged for him to reconsider. When he kept denying our help, I just could not stop thinking about what would happen to him in the next few months or years. There were many times like this where I felt so emotionally connected to my client's predicaments.

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<sup>1</sup> See PHLP definition, available at: <http://www.phlp.org/home-page/providers/provider-faq/emergency-medical-assistance-for-immigrants-ema>

Working at CLS was such a valuable experience. Aside from the daily client interaction, I enjoyed working on several research projects, participating in Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) hearings, writing memos and briefs, and doing other advocacy work on behalf of my clients. I realized that to be a strong and effective advocate comes with a price. Working so closely with clients entails taking on some of their burdens to find ways to make their lives easier. Being able to truly empathize with their life situations helped to humble me and gave me such a greater appreciation for all of the opportunities I have been afforded.

## **The Drum Major Instinct: A Great Balancing Act**

Many weeks ago, I was reminded to write my Drum Major essay. I looked at previous participants' essays for guidance and soon realized that I never heard or read the sermon. Within minutes, I was listening to Dr. King discuss the drum major instinct that is deep within each of us. The drum major instinct is an internal motivator which pushes us to achieve distinction and surpass others. Dr. King admonishes us to *"look calmly and honestly at ourselves, and we will discover that we too have those same basic desires for recognition, for importance."* While the drum major instinct itself is not a bad attribute, Dr. King's sermon warns that failure to harness the drum major instinct can become destructive. It causes one's personality to become distorted and boastful. Those who do not harness their drum major instinct ultimately put others down to push themselves up. I found Dr. King's words to be very fitting for all legal professionals. We are all striving to be great but it is important to remember that we also have a duty of advocacy and service.

This summer I had the privilege of working in Washington, Pennsylvania at Southwestern PA Legal Aid Services (SPLAS). The majority of my work was handling dependency cases. One of the first hearings I observed was a termination of parental rights case. A parent's rights are terminated when the court feels that it would be in the best interest of the child. This means that the parent has not progressed or remedied

the cause(s) for dependency. As I read over the case history, I got a sense of how hard it can be to handle these types of cases and the issues that arise during representation. Some cases were fairly straightforward while others required a great deal of attention. This is especially challenging when the cases remain open for several months. Clients move often, change their phone numbers, or are just completely unreachable outside of a court date. Every so often, there are parents who do everything ordered by the court and their children are returned home in just a few months. Unfortunately, some do not see the benefit of completing court ordered services; others just do not seem to care. Some parents become discouraged when the system does not work as fast as they anticipate. No matter the situation, this area of the law requires a great deal of patience.

The attorney I worked with this summer was a great example of harnessing the drum major instinct. He worked tirelessly advocating for his clients even at the frustration of the guardian ad litem or Children Youth Services solicitor. I admire his work ethic, his passion for justice, and his courage to litigate even when the odds were unfavorable. He always displayed a great deal of professionalism and challenged the norm of doing things the way they've always been done. Numerous times, clients have told me how great of a job he does and that he's better than any private attorney. Rather than a list of accolades, he has obtained recognition and distinction through representation of clients. One of the greatest takeaways from my experience this summer is his example of balancing the desire to be successful and the demands of service. While we all possess the drum major instinct, the best thing we can do is let our work and advocacy for the client speak for itself.

## **The Pennsylvania Utility Law Project: Drum Majors for Inclusivity**

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. once said in his speech entitled “The Future of Integration” that “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”

I came to law school with the goal to achieve justice and equal opportunity for all people in all aspects of life by shaping policy and laws. However, I never realized, as a young person, what a crucial part that utilities play in the “justice” of which Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke. My time at the Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP) has shown me that fighting for low-income citizens to have equal access to utilities can really mean the difference between a meal and a warm house during the winter. The attorneys at PULP are a few of the individuals who Martin Luther King, Jr. described that sacrifice and struggle in their goal for justice. Their dedication and passionate concern for low-income individuals has inspired me to continue to work towards policies that I believe will help disadvantaged citizens.

PULP is determined to make sure that low-income customers are considered in all plans and law proposals that involve utility companies and their customers. During my time at PULP, the project was preparing testimony in utility rate cases against three utility companies. Rate cases occur when companies propose plans to increase their

fixed rates that they charge their customers. As I attended technical conferences, settlement meetings and coalitions during the course of these cases, PULP took a strong stance in favor of low-income residents. I admire the fact that PULP takes a strong stance to ensure that such views are represented even if the majority of the parties involved in the case may not strongly consider how policies such as increased rates affect low-income citizens.

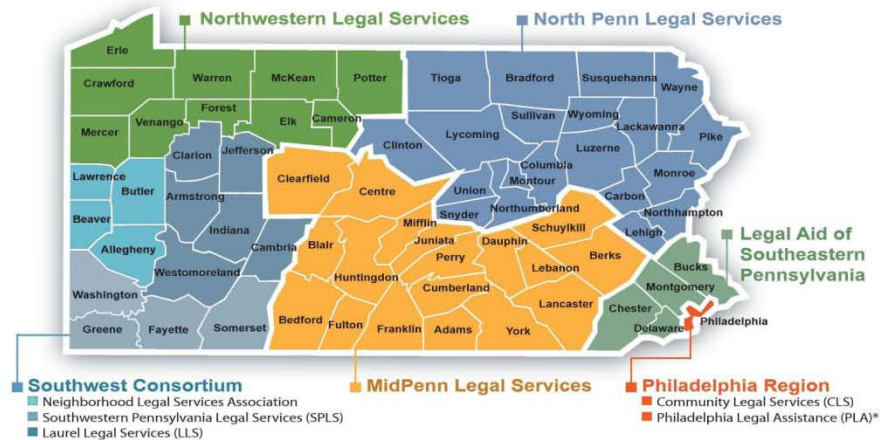
In addition to attending rate case meetings, I drafted comments in response to natural gas utility plans and in response to the Proposed Fiscal Year 2016 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”). LIHEAP is a winter heating assistance program that offers assistance in the form of a cash grant or crisis grant for households in immediate danger of being without heat. To draft these comments, I had to carefully read and analyze the plans to find any proposed changes that could potentially affect low-income residents. I realized that changes that can seem small to utility companies or the Public Utility Commission may greatly change how a low-income household functions. The search for this detail speaks to the “tireless exertions” that someone who wants to achieve justice through policy must put forth. The large amount of effort that attorneys put into analyzing these documents and drafting testimony becomes worth it once it means that more low-income households are able to keep their heat and other utilities on during cold winter months. When I presented testimony at a LIHEAP public hearing for the propose plan based on a preview of my comments, it became clear that it is important for PULP to express their views about proposed state plans because other companies testify and express views that are often



opposite of what PULP wants for its clients. This makes it crucial that there is a voice that speaks out for the benefit of those who do not have disposable income to pay for utilities year round.

After this summer, I realized that not only do I want to be a drum major for justice; I want to be a drum major for inclusivity. My time at PULP has taught me just how complex inclusivity can be and the steps that must be taken to ensure that everyone is included in this fight. It is wonderful that there are attorneys in the legal world who are drum majors for people who may not have the willpower or resources to be drum majors for themselves. I look forward to continuing my advocacy journey and being able to shape policy – hopefully on the federal level. I truly believe, similar to the lyrics Dr. King recited toward the end of his drum major speech, that “If I can help somebody as I pass along... Then my living will not be in vain.”

# Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN)



## Specialized Programs

These programs provide statewide legal expertise for addressing specialized legal problems or serving populations with special needs.

- Community Justice Project (CJP)
- Friends of Farmworkers (FoF)
- Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP)
- Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project ((PILP)
- Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP)
- Regional Housing Legal Services (RHLS)

\*Non-PLAN Funded Program

## Regional Programs

Community Legal Services  
 Laurel Legal Services  
 Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania  
 MidPenn Legal Services  
 Neighborhood Legal Services Association  
 North Penn Legal Services  
 Northwestern Legal Services  
 Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services  
 Philadelphia Legal Assistance\*

## Specialty Programs

Community Justice Project  
 Friends of Farmworkers  
 Pennsylvania Health Law Project  
 Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project  
 Pennsylvania Utility Law Project  
 Regional Housing Legal Services



Funding for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Program is provided by Pennsylvania IOLTA and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services