

This summer I had the opportunity to work in the District Attorney's office in Coffee County Tennessee. This office, in the 14<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, prosecutes crimes committed in Coffee County, Tennessee and includes the cities of both Manchester and Tullahoma. This office cooperates with local law enforcement ranging from county, city, and state to investigate and prosecute various crimes from murder to TennCare fraud. I was tasked with various projects throughout the summer and had the opportunity to engage with the District Attorney and his assistants, the investigator, the court system, and the local community. I learned how to piece together files and orders that are crucial in presenting cases before the court, as well as what all goes into preparing cases for events such as pleas and even trials.

The skills I learned during my internship have enhanced my ability to work in an office environment, as well as what to expect in a legal environment. My responsibilities included being present during court throughout the week, filing documents with the court, and even speaking with various victims about the events within a case. However, one of the larger projects I had the opportunity to be involved in was centered around two major court days for Coffee County involving cases that are a result of the Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival held every summer in Manchester. Throughout the summer, I corresponded with those who were given citations during the festival for a range of offenses. I spoke with them in the weeks leading up to their respective court date about their legal options and what would likely happen during their court appearance. The two court dates that took place, one in July and one in August, allowed me to have exposure to types of cases that were different from the ones that I had been accustomed to seeing on our local court docket. During the August court date, I worked with those in the

District Attorney's office, Public Defender's office, and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation to check for diversion eligibility for those who were given citations. This was and will be a crucial aspect in the final judgement in these cases because it determines whether or not a conditional plea of guilty will be dismissed or if the plea of guilty will be accepted by the court as a result of a violation of the terms and conditions of diversion. It gave me the chance to have even more correspondence with defendants and their attorneys, in addition to allowing me to see almost all aspects of the law that day.

My time in the District Attorney's office, as well as court, often challenged my views of my community and the legal system. I was exposed to rulings and judgements that I felt were both fair and unfair, as well as being posed with questions about how to help those in the community while also holding them accountable. Some cases may seem to be simple, but most are quite complex. My internship helped me realize just how difficult it can be to make decisions that affect an individual's life and freedom, and often even their families. I have been very fortunate in my internship to have been surrounded by attorneys who were intelligent, strong, and committed. I was also very privileged to get to know two women in particular that serve as assistant district attorneys. While there are more female attorneys now than ever, it was inspiring to see what I strive to one day be embodied in such a way that I often times felt encouraged and inspired when I left the courtroom and office each day.

My internship allowed me to explore a career that is very much rooted in community, something I have always wanted in a future profession. While I did spend most of my days with what some would label as the worst of the worst in my hometown, most of them are and can be good people. I felt that certain things, like my visit to the Drug Court program, reminded me that

the defendants I encountered in court were really just people who made a bad decision or two and just needed that extra support and encouragement to be the people they wanted to be for themselves, their family, and their community. It kept me from viewing them as “less than” as some would consider them to be due to a few momentary lapses in judgement or circumstances unfamiliar to most of us. The drug court program reminded me that they were people just like me that faced difficult conditions and setbacks that they were fighting to overcome, which in its own way, was inspiring.

The time I spent in court made me ask more questions about tough problems, such as drug use and domestic violence, that overwhelm small rural communities. It made me ask myself what more I could do to help change this cycle that some unfortunately seem to be unable to escape. It made me question how do we as a county, state, and country stop the revolving door of crimes that are perpetuated by circumstances such as lack of education and economic opportunity. I had the sometimes difficult task of speaking with victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and even murder. It helped me realize that often times the job of an attorney is to just listen and be there. Some victims just needed to know someone truly cared and would stand up and fight for them. It was both heartbreaking to see victims go through difficult times and heartwarming to see the individuals in my office do their best to ensure it did not happen again. My time in this office has reinforced my interests in law and my goals to one day be an attorney. I enjoyed my time in circuit and general sessions criminal court and I am excited to one day explore other aspects of law. I hope that from my time at Sewanee and my experiences during this internship, I will be constantly reminded to work for those around me and to make communities like my own a better place.

