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Summer Internship with Judge Van Tatenhove

Over this past summer I had the opportunity to work with two other interns in the Chambers of United States District Judge Gregory F. Van Tatenhove of the Eastern District of Kentucky. The Eastern District of Kentucky is one of two federal jurisdictions within the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The Eastern District's jurisdiction encompasses 67 counties and has six offices in Lexington, Ashland, Covington, Frankfort, and London.

Cases brought to Federal Court must meet one or more specific criteria. Federal Courts hear cases involving the constitutionality of the law, cases involving laws and treaties of the U.S., ambassadors and public ministers, disputes between two or more states, admiralty law, and bankruptcy cases. Before these types of cases can be presented, the Court must ask three questions: first, is this an actual legal dispute requiring federal jurisdiction, or is it just a hypothetical situation? Second, is there legal standing for this case? And third, does Federal Court have the power to remedy this problem? While the Eastern District of Kentucky has jurisdiction over all the aforementioned case types, most cases I observed in Federal Court this summer were criminal drug trafficking offenses, mail and check frauds, armed robberies, bank robberies, pleas to information, conspiracies, and child pornography offenses. The Eastern District also exercises authority over civil lawsuits claiming damages exceeding \$ 75,000.

The majority of my duties as a summer intern were performed at the federal court houses in Frankfort, KY and London, KY. My time in Judge Van Tatenhove's chambers was spent

completing four rather large projects and observing court proceedings to get as much exposure to the Federal Court system as possible.

I conducted a survey of the top 15 law schools in the country for Judge Van Tatenhove. The survey's purpose was to find out what law classes were being taught by judges at the top institutions. My second project was to read legal briefs from on-going cases to help summarize specific arguments and facts contained within the briefs for Judge Van Tatenhove's law clerks. The law clerks would then take my summaries and use them as an aid to write their own legal opinions. The third project was a joint effort between me and my fellow interns. As a team, we would write summaries of trials that Judge Van Tatenhove presided over to use for his records. The fourth project was by far the largest and most rewarding. Drew Trimble, law clerk and my in office internship coordinator, allowed me to prepare a legal writing sample. The sample dealt with a pro se Habeas Corpus petition that I reviewed, and using basic legal knowledge, I attempted to prepare a legal brief in response to the appellant's argument for Habeas Corpus relief. This writing sample was not used for any legal purposes but rather was an opportunity to showcase what I had learned collectively about interpreting the law, the federal legal system, and the legal writing style. This project's impact on the office as a whole was substantial, and the work that I completed aided the federal law clerks with their own cases on the docket. Overall I accomplished a large amount of small tasks to help Judge Van Tatenhove's busy Chambers run smoothly.

The summer internship was unpaid but that was not a concern of mine. I was paid with a wealth of information, a tremendous amount of experience for an undergraduate student, and became familiar with a group of very talented legal professionals that provided advice whenever

I asked. Throughout the eight weeks I was able to see a multitude of proceedings including re-arraignments, sentencing, oral arguments, and a two day criminal jury trial. The two day trial was a great learning experience because I was able to see the entire process unfold in a rather short amount of time. The jury selection process of *voir dire* took up about half a day and then opposing counsels were able to present facts and evidence to either refute or support the criminal charges made against the defendant. The United States Attorney was able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt to the jury that the defendant had committed the crime and he was judged guilty.

While the two-day trial was a great display of the legal system at work, I would say that a sentencing proceeding I observed on my second-to-last day of work was the most influential experience of my judicial internship. A young man, aged 19, had pled guilty to an armed robbery a few months prior and that day, July 28, was the day he would receive his sentence. According to the United States Probation Office he had a troubled juvenile record. Now he faced a substantial period of incarceration, possibly up to 15 years in Federal Prison, a very scary and rough place. His life up to this point had been anything but easy. But the most tragic thing about this young man's sentencing proceeding was that he had no support in the courtroom, save his attorney. No family, no friends, and no mentors. That's when I realized that an attorney's job is not to win the case but is to be there for his/her client, to be a continual source of support. Everyone needs proper, competent, and effective representation in order for the legal system to work. A good attorney will stick by his client even when no one else can or will. This summer internship solidified my career goal of being an attorney because despite the measures put in place to make sure the legal system does not fail people, sometimes it still does. I would like to be the best attorney for people who need support in difficult times in their lives,

whether they are facing a significant period of incarceration or a multimillion dollar lawsuit.

This internship instilled in me a passion for learning about the law, interpreting law, and using it to solve real people's problems.