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This summer, I interned at The Legal Aid Society in New York City. I was assigned to the Special Litigation Unit, which initiates class action and law reform case litigation on civil rights issues affecting Criminal Practice clients. The scope of my summer work involved two separate areas: one involving administrative appeals of disciplinary decisions of inmates in New York City Jails, and the other involving a lawsuit against the City of New York for sexual assault of female detainees on Rikers Island.

For the administrative appeals, I went to Rikers approximately twice a week to meet with inmates or detainees who were challenging their disciplinary decision. They were generally informal meetings; I was there to hear their side of the story so that I could pass along the information to my boss to see if we could argue their case. A lot of the issues over the summer involved violence at Rikers, and a lot of the people, particularly the men, described the need to fight as a struggle to survive in Rikers. Life in Rikers was a bubble, closed off from the outside world, and they did what they had to in order to get by and survive. But, they were still sanctioned for the acts of violence. And most of the work I did with these clients was ensuring their due process rights were not violated in the course of proceedings. Because these people were already deprived of many of their basic rights in confinement, and they were in a particularly vulnerable position, I thought it was important to safeguard their fundamental due process rights.

The other half of my work involved a lawsuit against the city for sexual assault of female detainees. For this lawsuit, which was in the discovery phase over the summer, I also met with women both in and out of Rikers to obtain testimony and to check on the well-being of women. Much of my work was less to obtain legal information and more to serve as a familiar face. I would try to meet with the same women to see how they were doing in this process and let them know we were doing everything we can. This was one of the more difficult aspects of the summer, listening to the stories of women who had been subjected to rape or assault while they were entrusted to the protection of the city. But this was also the most meaningful part of my job because I felt that we were on the cusp of systematic change in New York City's jails, and that the voice of these women would have a profound impact on the safety of future women.

Overall, I spent a lot of time at Rikers this summer. This position opened my eyes to the pervasive injustices that occurred there, but also afforded me a unique opportunity to meet and talk with people from a different background and in a different life position. Their stories reinforced my commitment to a career in public interest work.

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