

For my 1L summer, I interned at Philadelphia Legal Assistance in their Public Benefits Unit, where I focused exclusively on unemployment compensation cases. Throughout the summer, I had the amazing opportunity to represent, by myself, clients in their administrative law hearings, challenging the denial of their unemployment compensation benefits. Often times at the appeal hearing, employers would be present and offer testimony/evidence about my client engaging in willful misconduct or voluntarily quitting his/her job. In addition to representing clients at their appeal hearing, I was able to continue my advocacy efforts by writing two appellate briefs to the Unemployment Compensation Board of Review, arguing why the hearing was decided incorrectly. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity to fully immerse myself in direct services work and be the front-line advocate for clients as they navigated the appeal system for unemployment compensation benefits.

For me, there is nothing more rewarding or impactful than working with clients and providing them an opportunity to feel that their voices were finally being heard. Over the summer, I learned that during the initial interview I have with a client, it is essential for me to put my pen and paper down and just listen to the client's story and information he/she wants to share. After learning all the information, I felt it was important for me to then explain to my clients the structure of the appeal hearing and the legal issue at hand, so that the client would better understand what information would be legally relevant to the case.

One of the greatest challenges I had representing clients in their appeal hearings was the power dynamics between employers and low-wage workers. There is no discovery in unemployment compensation appeal hearings, which meant that the record I was working with contained the information my client told me and any documentation he/she had. Often times, employers would refuse to give the employee copies of documents he/she had signed or only communicate with an employee verbally, which meant that in the hearing, I had no documentary

evidence to present. Thus, I had many cases where an employer would bring documents alleging that my client engaged in improper conduct and I would have to quickly confer with my client to see if he/she had ever seen the form before and try to challenge the accuracy of the form if my client denied committing the alleged conduct. In order to prepare to best handle these situations, I would spend hours prepping for each case and creating timelines from the information my client provided, so that I would know the facts he/she told me inside out.

If a client went on to appeal the hearing officer's decision, I would write an appellate brief to the Unemployment Compensation Board of Review. As I had not learned how to write appellate briefs during my 1L year, I struggled initially with the structure and persuasive, yet to the point writing style. One of my biggest issues was that I felt so strongly for my clients about how the outcome had been wrongly decided that my initial drafts contained too many arguments. After working closely with my supervisor and reading briefs that she had submitted, I started to gain more confidence in my persuasive writing.

Both of these assignments this summer have had a great impact on how I approach being a legal professional. As someone who is very organized and likes to prepare for everything beforehand, the quick-paced nature of the appeal hearings and the constant unknown of what information and evidence would be presented by the employer taught me how to get better at thinking on my feet, preparing my witness, and asking strong redirect questions to my witness. This summer taught me how to be the strongest advocate for my clients whether that be through my oral advocacy skills or persuasive writing and truly reaffirmed for me my commitment to public interest law. Based on this experience, I am really looking for future employment to have the opportunity to balance direct service and appellate advocacy, as I am continuing to figure out how I want to balance direct service and litigation work in my employment post-graduation.