



1401 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005

phone: 202-662-8354
www.lawyerscomm.org

2009-2010 Externship Program – Expanded Description of Issues

Interested applicants in the Lawyers' Committee's externship program have the opportunity to work on exciting, cutting edge civil rights issues at the national level. Below are brief descriptions of the type of work and issues on which externs could be involved. While externs will be assigned a primary substantive area based on interest and need, many will have an opportunity to work in additional areas. Most of the issues below (excluding community development) can involve litigation experience if so desired. However, all areas have the possibility on non-litigation work, including public policy advocacy and research and writing, as well as working with clients. Community development work involves primarily transactional assistance, but also includes an advocacy focus. We encourage both litigators and transactional associates (or incoming associates interested in a particular practice group) to apply. As the Lawyers' Committee co-counsels with volunteer law firms on all of our matters, all externs will work with our pro bono counsel, along with our staff attorneys. Please note as civil rights issues evolve on a daily basis, the specific opportunities for externs will invariably expand and change. In addition, as noted previously, law firms may discuss with the Lawyers' Committee the desire to limit an extern's exposure to matters that have either a direct or business conflict with the paid work of the law firm (such as employment discrimination or foreclosure work.)

Community Development

The Lawyers' Committee provides direct legal services to non-profit organizations focused on community revitalization and asset building in low income and minority communities. Non-litigation business law services are crucial to sustaining the important work of these front line organizations, but often exceed the financial capacity of their tight budgets. Externs will provide corporate, transactional, regulatory and policy development assistance to community based non-profit clients in Mississippi, Louisiana, New Jersey, North Carolina and the District of Columbia. Current assignments include the formation of a community land trust to create affordable housing in New Orleans, research and advocacy on behalf of a community development organization in the Louisiana Delta, and the preparation of alerts and outreach for community development organizations fighting blight and falling home prices in communities affected by the current foreclosure crisis. The work includes document drafting, research, and significant client contact.

Educational Opportunities

The Lawyers' Committee strives to guarantee that all students receive equal educational opportunities in public schools and institutions of higher learning. We work to promote school integration; support the mission of the No Child Left Behind Act; and challenge discriminatory discipline and classroom assignment practices as well as school finance inadequacy. In the wake of the 2007 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved*, the Lawyers' Committee is at the forefront of developing strategic ways to implement constitutionally permissible school assignment plans with a consciousness of race and other factors. An extern working on education issues will concentrate on maximizing the potential of disadvantaged students and narrowing the achievement gap between low income and more affluent students, and minority and non-minority students, including being involved in active litigation. Additionally, an extern will be involved in our Parental Empowerment Program, which promotes the importance of parental involvement in curtailing the significant drop-out rate for Latino and African American youth, through community forums to learn about the most pressing issues of discrimination within school districts.

Employment Discrimination

The Lawyers' Committee works to dismantle barriers to workplace equity through litigation, education and public policy advocacy. The Project litigates cases under the United States Constitution, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, Section 1981 and other federal or state employment laws as appropriate. The Lawyers' Committee also has a significant amicus practice where it files briefs in the U.S. Supreme Court and Circuit Courts of Appeal in cases of great importance to the preservation of the rights of employees. Externs who work on litigation will perform tasks such as investigating potential cases, drafting pleadings and discovery, taking

and defending depositions, negotiating with opposing counsel, and participating in hearings. Externs who participate in other employment discrimination work will perform tasks such as drafting briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court and other courts, analyzing legislation, coordinating efforts with our coalition partners, and attending meetings and educating members of federal agencies charged with enforcing federal civil rights laws in the area of employment as appropriate.

Environmental Justice

The Lawyers' Committee seeks justice for people of color who are fighting to clean up contamination in their community or who are fighting to stop environmentally harmful activities from occurring in their neighborhoods. Externs interested in this issue will work on a variety of matters, including both advocacy and some litigation. For example, currently, we are litigating a case against the Army Corps of Engineers on behalf of coastal Mississippi communities challenging a regional general permit issued in violation of the Clean Water Act. The Lawyers' Committee is also involved in federal advocacy for toxin-free schools, as many urban schools are located near polluting facilities. We are working to protect the environmental health of minority and low-income communities through this initiative. Additionally, we are coordinating an analysis of legal state of environmental justice to provide guidance to the federal executive and legislative bodies on developing environmental policies that do not disproportionately burden already vulnerable communities and take into account the continuing burdens on these same communities.

Housing Discrimination

The Lawyers' Committee litigates lawsuits primarily pursuant to the federal Fair Housing Act, which was passed in 1968 to address continued residential segregation and broadly to prohibit discrimination in housing. Cases brought pursuant to the Fair Housing Act are typically class actions brought to challenge discrimination in private markets, in public and assisted housing, and in zoning and other land use decisions by state and local governments. We have also been active in drafting amicus curiae briefs in important fair lending cases and is focusing public policy work on addressing discrimination in the subprime mortgage market, a key factor in the mortgage and foreclosure crisis facing the nation. The Lawyers' Committee is now actively working to implement recommendations set forth in the report issued by our National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. In addition, we are continuing our work in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and are actively litigating two cases. Externs can expect to work primarily on our fair housing litigation, but will also be asked to assist in promoting the public policy agenda.

Voting Rights

The Lawyers' Committee advances the voting rights of minority voters and other groups of voters who have been traditionally disenfranchised through litigation, Election Protection, electoral reform, education, and advocacy. We litigate cases under the United States Constitution, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, and other federal voting protections. Externs who work on litigation will perform tasks such as investigating potential cases, drafting pleadings and discovery, taking and defending depositions, negotiating with opposing counsel, and participating in hearings. Externs who participate in other voting work will perform tasks such as drafting briefing papers, coordinating the efforts of our state and local Legal Committees on various electoral reform issues, conducting research and engaging in public education efforts.

Other Issues (Foreclosure Crisis/Deceptive Lending Practices/Criminal Justice)

During this economic crisis, the Lawyers' Committee is continuing to closely work with our national partners and clients on the issues impacting our client base in particular – low-income and minority communities across the country. We are currently developing various programs to address the foreclosure crisis and deceptive lending practices. Although our adaptations to the quickly evolving environment engulfing these issues prevent us from sharing specific information at this time, we would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these potential strategies with any interested externs. There is a serious need for the civil rights legal community to be involved in this area and we very much welcome externs to focus on these pivotal issues. In addition, the Lawyers' Committee has always and remains deeply concerned about wide racial and ethnic disparities in the administration of criminal justice. While our involvement in recent years has been limited, we continue to examine how our pursuit of justice in civil law can prevent the disproportionate numbers of people of color in the criminal law system. In addition, we are considering our involvement, in a limited capacity, in the important issues of police misconduct and racial profiling. Externs interested in this area would also be assigned a second primary issue.

For additional information, please contact Nancy Anderson, Pro Bono Counsel, at 202-662-8354 or nanderson@lawyerscomm.org. Thank you for your interest.