

SUMMER CLERKSHIPS

SPECIAL EDUCATION PRACTICE

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES DIVISION

THE
PUBLIC
DEFENDER
SERVICE
for the District of Columbia



CHAMPIONS OF LIBERTY

This is YOUR opportunity to learn and acquire practice skills from our highly skilled and experienced Special Education Attorneys:

- Participate in a practice at the intersection of special education advocacy and criminal defense work.
- Experience sophisticated and complex work at every phase of special education advocacy including administrative advocacy at due process hearings.
- Collaborate on special education cases with criminal defense lawyers, forensic social workers, investigators, and experts.
- Encounter the level of attention, preparation, and resources we are able to bring to bear on each special education case that we handle.
- Practice team defense, which in our special education practice means in most cases there will be active involvement by PDS's other divisions.
- Participate in advocacy that is collaborative in nature and centered on advancing the client's interests as defined by the client.
- Receive hands on experience with trial work through our Trial Practice Group (TPG) weekly sessions. TPG's are run by lawyers in our Trial Division and is a unique feature of our summer program.



PDS is a wonderful place for law students to begin to learn how law is practiced and often under the most compelling and difficult of circumstances for clients. Our incredibly talented lawyers are committed to the noblest of ideals. For our special education practice, this means utilizing our legal skills to protect children from losing their liberty and ensuring they have a meaningful opportunity to succeed in life – with their access to education and services being a principal path toward that success. In addition to the professional development a summer clerk will experience while at PDS, they'll have the high privilege to make a difference in someone's life.

— Sabrina, Nina, and Nakisha, Staff Attorneys

OUR SPECIAL EDUCATION PRACTICE

Our special education practice is also made complex because it is at the intersection of criminal defense and special education advocacy. Thus, many cases generate questions that affect a client's criminal procedure protections and how our advocacy can help or hinder a child's criminal defense in his juvenile case. For example, Fifth Amendment concerns are implicated in any case where the client has a parallel criminal case or potential criminal exposure. These concerns can and often inform tactical decisions in our special education cases. This dynamic adds a layer of complexity to our special education practice because our efforts are not only directed at securing children a full measure of their rights under the IDEA, but also at positively affecting the disposition of their juvenile case. All this to say that our cases are intellectually challenging and require the highest level of skills to navigate these issues and achieve good educational and criminal defense outcomes for our clients.

THE LAW CLERKSHIP EXPERIENCE

A summer law clerk will receive mentoring and close supervision in any special education case he/she will be working on. In every case or project the student clerk works on, he/she will have close attorney supervision and they will be exposed to PDS's team defense approach to representation. During the course of the summer clerkship, the student can expect to attend school meetings (e.g. IEP meetings, manifestation hearings), school disciplinary hearings, juvenile court proceedings, due process hearings that are scheduled during the summer, conduct legal research, document review and analysis, draft school advocacy correspondence and interact with and participate in meetings with clients, experts, and school staff. Our summer clerks also assist with the drafting of state and due process complaints. They will also assist attorneys in mediations and administrative hearings at the student hearing office. In the past, law clerks have assisted with drafting testimony on education issues before the DC Council.

If you have a background or demonstrated interest in education, this clerkship opportunity is for you!



I was so happy to be a law clerk at PDS last summer. I worked on special education litigation for juvenile clients, a new area of law for me but one that completely captivated and inspired me as a former high school teacher. Making sure that schools support our clients is a perfect example of the innovative, holistic, and zealous approach to client advocacy at PDS. As part of my clerkship, I participated in a Trial Practice Group where I got to hone my oral advocacy skills with some of the best trial attorneys in the country—it was been both incredibly invaluable and wildly fun. PDS also organized informational panels related to public defense, PD offices in other cities, and other fellowship/employment opportunities for clerks to attend. This particular summer, even with the unique virtual environment brought on by COVID-19, indigent representation feels more important than ever. After walking with PDS in the Public Defenders March for Black Lives, I certainly feel a new kind of inspired.

— Christine Lorica, Summer Law Clerk