

PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICE

FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Law Clerks with the Mental Health Division

The Mental Health Division of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia presently has seven staff attorneys who defend indigent persons in civil commitment proceedings, represent persons acquitted by reason of insanity in release hearings, and advocate for clients on a wide variety of issues raised by involuntary psychiatric hospitalization. Located on the grounds of St. Elizabeths Hospital, the District's public mental health facility, the Mental Health Division (MHD) also employs two social workers, two investigators, and an office administrator.

MHD employs law students to assist its attorneys in preparing for trials, motions hearings, and appellate matters. Law clerks at MHD can expect to be engaged primarily in legal research and writing, often under tight time deadlines. Projects completed by past law clerks include: research used to draft a new mental retardation commitment law for D.C., drafting revisions to the District's law regarding the trial competence of defendants in criminal cases (which included a survey of the current law in all 50 states), writing a motion to protect the right of self-representation of persons facing civil commitment.

Compensation for clerkships can take a variety of forms. We encourage students to secure public interest fellowships, stipends, or internships. If a student wishes to receive academic credit, MHD staff will gladly cooperate with the law school regarding any required supervision or evaluations. Finally, many students volunteer their services for all or part of a semester or for the summer. While we are unable to monetarily compensate students for their work here, we offer an invaluable learning experience.

Applicants must submit a resume, a cover letter highlighting their interest, qualifications, availability, a law school transcript copy, a legal writing sample, and two references. Interviews will be conducted on a flexible basis for spring and fall semesters, and in February and March for the summer. Hiring decisions for the summer will be made at the end of March of that year. Minority students are encouraged to apply. Send application to: Attn: Law Clerk Application, Mental Health Division, Public Defender Service for DC, St. Elizabeths Hospital, Barton Hall, Room 115, Washington, DC, 20032.