

# COVID-19 INTERNSHIP

*This article is dedicated to the late Amber Racine.*

*Thank you for being a selfless mentor and for pushing everyone to new heights.*

**By Brittany Stokes**



**L**ike many first-year law students, I spent my winter break extensively searching for a summer internship. Two months into my search, I came across a judicial internship at the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas. I knew this would be an excellent opportunity to experience criminal law from a judicial perspective, observe trials, and become a better writer. Although I was nervous and uncertain about what I signed up for, I was excited that my interviewers were impressed with my qualifications and challenged me to distinguish myself.

edited legal documents to ensure case law was applicable and citations were accurate. I also participated in an eight-week Virtual Summer Law Clerk Guest Speaker Program. Every week, an intern was selected to interview a prominent Philadelphia judge or attorney about their law school experience, career paths, the effects of

A few weeks after accepting my internship position, COVID-19 plagued the United States. Law schools and criminal justice centers alike shut down, and internships were left in limbo. As I transferred to remote learning, I held out hope that my internship was not canceled. As finals concluded, I came across a CBS Philly article stating that the Philadelphia Courts were closed until September. Upon reading this information, I knew my internship was canceled and immediately began to panic. From the first day of law school, I learned the importance of the first-year internship in advancing my legal career. At this moment, I felt like I was losing one of only two opportunities I had to find my career path. Within minutes, I reached out to the judicial secretary to reconsider my internship. In a detailed email, I explained that I was flexible and more than willing to draft opinions from home to gain the experience. Shortly afterward, the judge's law clerk responded to my email with a new virtual start date and explained what my summer internship would look like due to COVID-19.

COVID-19 on their specific practice, and most importantly, to ask for advice for law students in the beginning stages of their legal careers. Through this program, I met legal professionals that looked like me and explored different career paths in various offices around the city, including the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, Philadelphia Defenders Association, Kline and Specter PC, Comcast, and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP.

My internship was everything that I imagined. I expected to observe criminal trials and motions in various courtrooms, assist the judge in legal research and writing, connect with criminal law attorneys, and potentially find my career path. During my virtual internship, I conducted extensive legal research, analyzed trial transcripts, and drafted judicial opinions on complex legal issues from my living room. Each week, I was given a new legal issue and a submission date. Throughout the summer, I worked on issues such as judicial discretion, viable defenses, insufficient evidence, and ineffective trial counsel. Upon completing my assignments, I reviewed and

Although my summer internship circumstances were unconventional, it forced me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to become a better version of myself. Within eight weeks, I became a more confident writer, a new member of the *Widener Law Review*, and drafted a judicial opinion as a first-year law student. Further, I learned that attorneys and law students must always be adaptable and resilient so that justice can prevail, even in a pandemic. After completing my judicial internship, I am no longer unsure of my calling. My place is in litigation. I am thankful for my virtual internship and learned a lot from crafting judicial arguments on paper. But now, I am ready to advocate for others. ■

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