Helmer, Conley & Kasselman Annual College Scholarship

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My first day as an intern with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights was marked by the passing of Justice Ginsburg. The department, led by her former law clerk Rachel Wainer Apter is devoted to seeing equity, inclusion, and long term healing take root in New Jersey.

Although I had already been deeply interested in the law and using it as a tool for good, that day fueled me to continue Justice Ginsburg’s mission–to create a more just and equal nation. As a first generation American and a woman, I am deeply impacted by Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s relentless work against discrimination. My family had fled religious discrimination against Jews in the former Soviet Union, and seeing the protections guaranteed to us by the United States Constitution is a powerful reminder to me of my duty to protect them.

The legal field is notoriously gatekept, both by connections and generational access, but also by affordability. However, I was able to work and study enough to be accepted to a competitive magnet school in New Jersey called the Bergen County Technical School, which also boasted an incredible Law and Justice program. There we learned the theoretical foundations of our legal traditions, constitutional law, criminology, public policy, and provided me with the skills to secure my first internship with the Honorable Peter J. Melchionne, the

Presiding Family Court Judge in Bergen County. The judge, and the chambers as a whole, helped me gain a greater understanding of the law in practice, how it affects families, and what makes a good attorney. Bergen Tech was an amazing formative experience in my journey to being an attorney, particularly by exposing me to public interest law which I hope to practice in the future. Years later, during my interview to be an intern with the Supreme Court of the United States, my interviewer asked me about my unique high school experience. She said it is amazing that I have had this exposure, and I wholeheartedly agree. This foray into the legal field gave me writing, speaking, leadership, and soft skills that help me rise to the top of any situation.

My interest in law took a more focused look at Barnard. I still am interested in being a lawyer serving the community and have had the opportunity to explore civil rights, privacy, and technological innovation through the lens of the constitution and litigation. As a member of the community I serve as the Executive Vice President of the Athena Pre-Law Society as well as a Managing Editor of the Columbia Political Review. Drawing from my own struggles navigating through the legal field and being a first-generation American, I founded and executed a mentorship program that connected Barnard alumni in law and government to Pre-Law Society members in partnership with Barnard’s Career Services center. Further, at the Columbia Political

Review I am one of the youngest members of the Executive Board and oversee a team of 30 writers and editors. The journal as a whole has been one of my favorite organizations because it has allowed me to explore different legal topics in depth. I have written a number of articles on the courts, privacy legislation, and most notably, the constitutionality of mask mandates, which was the journal’s most popular article. Both through my writing and research and classes I’ve taken, I have been particularly interested in the intersection of the law and technology. As a member of the first generation of “digital natives” I see so many ways that litigation can touch technology in the next 50 years, beginning with privacy limits in the 4th Amendment, 1st Amendment speech on the Internet, and the limits of law enforcement when it comes to digital spaces. Given my family’s origins in the Soviet Union, I have been particularly interested in how technology and disinformation has affected the recent war in Ukraine. I hope to use my law school education to analyze how technology and the Internet is actually a public good, similar to climate change. As a result, global conventions on the use of technology need to be implemented to mitigate social manipulation, as seen in Russia right now.

I had the honor to serve as an intern with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights for almost a whole year in the Community Relations Unit. As a founding member in that Unit I saw the incredible work that it takes to reach members of the community and inform them of their rights, the remedy that the law offers, and how they might be able to seek relief. I created a database of community partners that is still being used today to reach places of worship, schools, community organizations, among others. Another responsibility that I had at DCR was to create an internal report on the impacts of COVID-19 through the lens of racism, housing disparity, and health inequity. Conducting the necessary research and presenting it to the Division helped me serve my community and make a step towards ameliorating inequity in New Jersey. I was extremely honored to earn the 2021 New Jersey State Governor’s Jefferson Award in the Dr.

Martin Luther King Jr. Champion for Justice Category, America’s highest honor for public service and volunteerism as a result. Last fall, I interned with the US Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York in their Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit. Seeing how the justice system is run from the prosecutorial side has shown me the care and expertise put into every case on behalf of “the people.”

After all my hard work, I am extremely honored and proud to have earned an internship with the Supreme Court of the United States. They take two interns every summer and I will be

located in the Office of the Clerk which handles docketing Supreme Court cases, admitting attorneys to the Supreme Court Bar, and handing down decisions. This is obviously not only my victory, but that of my family, who are the world’s biggest cheerleaders. I am proud to say that I have been able to *work* my way to my dreams and that my successes rest not on money or family connections, but on the strength of my will and perseverance. Combining all of my experiences, I see the law as a tool that can be used in a variety of perspectives to create meaningful, positive change. As a first-generation American, I see both how the law is unjust, in the cases of racial violence, but also how much potential we have to make our legal systems even better. Justice Ginsburg’s dissent in *Shelby County v. Holder*, contains a phrase harkening back the words of the leader of the march from Selma to Montgomery that rings true to so many social issues being discussed today, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Thanks to our legal system, those harmed or seeking justice have an opportunity to appear before a judge and present their case. I hope to be an advocate for those individuals and I hope to pull on the lessons and wisdom of the former Justice who too, saw the law as a tool not an obstruction.