[Helmer, Conley & Kasselman Annual College Scholarship](https://www.helmerlegal.com/college-scholarship/)

Why I want to go into the Legal Field

If there is anything I have learned so far in my life about the law, it is that it, more often than not, contradicts itself. It is both aspirational and actual. It is both fluid and fixed. Our country strictly abides by the words in The Constitution, nevertheless our lawmakers propose new bills every day. Laws are life-altering. Issues behind laws both bring us together and divide us. It’s an arrangement that we, as members of this society, decided are going to follow. Laws are also the foundational blueprint to what we believe to be an ideal society. In other words, the law is both abstract as it is substantial. So one day, by calling myself a law student, I will also possess the titles of both dreamer and realist.

Throughout my early mornings as I got ready for school, I would get sight of what the world was facing that day on T.V. One December day, in the midst of my morning scurry, I overheard that a Supreme Court case that was decided on my birthday, 49 years ago, was on the cusp of being overturned. I sat in a Starbucks during my lunch break, with my headphones on and my hand on my forehead, listening to Justice Barrett posing Safe Haven Laws as positive alternatives to abortion, seemingly missing the principle entirely. The fundamental right for a woman to decide what she does with her own body was being debated in real time. I thought to myself: if something so vital was at risk of being obstructed, how far could our elected officials go? The mix of anger and powerlessness I felt made me, at least, realize that I no longer wanted to be a bystander to these injustices. My real fascination with social sciences began when I enrolled in a criminal justice class in my senior year of high school. Throughout my educational career, no subject seemed to appeal to an inner desire or spark an intellectual curiosity like the law did. I felt compelled to speak my mind in class discussions and fully immerse myself in material and topics outside of school. My main captivation was with the differing ways in which people perceive and interpret the same set of words written in the law. A good example being the Second Amendment. According to The Hill, the words in the Second Amendment do not explicitly prohibit private gun ownership, but they also don't mention a bar on any kind of government regulation (Clemens Jr.). The ambiguity behind those twenty seven words has resulted in unceasing debates and discussions surrounding our right to own a gun. Were our founding fathers speaking strictly of the military, or every United States citizen? If people can own firearms, how much government regulation was considered constitutional? The perpetual back and forth nature of these discussions make the law extremely fascinating.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the functional intricacies within our government, I interned for both Congresswoman Maloney and Congressman Goldman during my gap year. I spent most of my time, in these roles, acting as a liaison between constituents and federal agencies such as USCIS and the Department of Labor. While staffing Congressman Goldman at events, constituents voiced their hardships to me, whether it was a family member unable to get a green card, or the shocking unlivable conditions in their NYCHA apartments. It became apparent to me the prevalence of micro injustices occurring around me, each day, leaving many desperate for any kind of lifeline. I learned the average person was not aware of what their rights were, a matter that could be used against them. It was clear to me that being a mere reassurer left me feeling unsatisfied, useless, and that I wasn’t doing enough to help my constituents. These internships helped me discover that I do not want to simply provide solace, but to be the advocate for all people that feel powerless in this confusing system. Observing Congressman Goldman introduce and sponsor bills and dedicate his time to getting to know groups encompassing his district gave me a more thorough understanding of the nuances in the legislative branch, as well as my job as a caseworker. And while it was great to see, firsthand, such honorable and honest work being done, injustice remains prevalent.

A part of a lawyer's job is to ensure a fair trial for their client and push the prosecution to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. According to the Georgia Innocence Project, the truth is that about 4-6% of people incarcerated in US prisons are innocent, which makes about one in every twenty cases, a wrongful conviction (Beneath the Statistics). One of the most notable cases of wrongful conviction known as the Central Park Five brought to light prevalent issues such as racial bias, prosecutorial corruption, and the influence of immense media attention within the justice system. During the interrogation stages, no defense attorneys were present, and that, combined with the boys’ young age and violation of their Miranda Warnings, resulted in the boys being coerced into falsely confessing to a crime they did not commit (Vulaj). The conviction completely altered the lives of these boys, even years after release, as job prospects and home renting were made increasingly difficult (Saulny). Delving into this precedent-setting case made me recognize the importance of the role defense attorneys play and the checks and balances they contribute to the justice system. For one, a jury trial is the first and only level playing field for the defense as the prosecution is in the driver's seat for 90% of all pretrial procedures. They are at the frontline, neutralizing the fire and counteracting harsh media behavior and baseless public assumption. This alone makes an attorney's job one of the most vital in the criminal justice ecosystem and in the prevention of future false convictions. Learning of this case made me wonder how much different the outcome could have been if these checks and balances came into play. I would like to live in a world where even in the midst of utter chaos and doubt, every human being has the right to a strong and zealous defense, and I hope that becoming a lawyer will put me at the forefront of this cause.

Such an abstract concept like law, seems daunting to many, but at the core of it all, a profession in the legal field simply provides the means for me to help other people. Even without a traditional law education, I find myself drawn to being an advocate for others in my daily life.

The initial reason I fell in love with learning about the law is because it reminded me of one large jigsaw puzzle. Little by little, through trial and error, a piece is found and joined with the others, and each precedent-setting case symbolizes our growth towards a more just and fair-minded society. Obtaining a law degree allows a person to maximize their contribution to the puzzle, whether it’s upholding the right to a fair defense for an accused, advocating for those that are wrongfully convicted, or getting directly involved in the political sphere to fight for human rights. Understanding the principles of the law and our legal system gives a person the power to represent those that lack that understanding, the power to make real change in society.