



PUBLIC DEFENDER
Contra Costa County

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Public Defender

THE CONTRA COSTA PUBLIC DEFENDER RACIAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE

A Special Externship Opportunity for Berkeley Law Students
Fall 2016

The Contra Costa Racial Justice Collaborative is a special externship program for Berkeley Law students. Attorneys from the Contra Costa Public Defender's Office will directly supervise law students with the goal of challenging some of the most pressing racial disparities in Contra Costa County's criminal justice system.

The Collaborative

The Racial Justice Committee of the Contra Costa Public Defender's Office consists of attorneys who have worked within the criminal justice system and observed racism within the system at every stage of the process. We have witnessed too few people of color on our juries, too many people of color in our jails, too many children of color sentenced as adults and paraded through our streets in shackles. The criminal justice system in Contra Costa County needs to change, and we have committed ourselves to making that change happen. We have formed the Racial Justice Collaborative to further this work.

Underrepresentation of Persons of Color on Juries

In Fall 2016, the externship will focus on race as related to juries. Chronic underrepresentation of jurors of color in Contra Costa presents a crisis of community involvement in the justice system and deprives defendants of their fundamental constitutional rights. In Contra Costa, like many places around the county, defendants are routinely not tried by a jury of their peers, but rather by a select subset of the population. People of color are too often absent from our juries, and our jurors are too often drawn from communities other than those in which our clients live. Underrepresentation is both a byproduct and a cause of racism in our criminal justice system, but change is possible.

The Role of Law Students

Externs in the Fall 2016 program will work with attorneys from the Racial Justice Committee of the public defender's office to gather data on the jury venire process, draft proposals to local elected officials, and provide litigation support in active jury trial cases. This work will build on the efforts of our Spring 2016 extern, who has laid the groundwork for continued advocacy in these areas. Unlike other externs in our office, who handle a wide variety of legal work and more regularly argue in court, students in this program will focus primarily on creating complex legal motions related to jury underrepresentation. Students may also be asked to work on other litigation and advocacy projects directly related to addressing racial disparities in our justice system.

Students will participate in implicit bias training and legal advocacy training provided by attorneys on a range of racial justice issues. Students may also contribute research for trainings, as did our past extern for a Public Defenders for Racial Justice conference in San Francisco. Students will be closely supervised by attorneys and will receive instruction on enhancing their legal research, writing, and problem solving skills.

Application Process

Interested students should send a resume and cover letter detailing interest in the externship to jiseon.song@pd.cccounty.us by May 31, 2016.