



State Court Clerks Discuss Their Experiences

Claire (Grandy) Kenny '14

Claire Kenny is currently a Law Clerk at the Virginia Beach Circuit Court. She will begin as an Honors Attorney for the Department of Labor this fall.

Ruth Payne: Hi Claire: Thanks for agreeing to do this today. I'll jump right in...Can you tell me a little bit about your clerkship?

Claire Kenny: Sure. I'm clerking for the Virginia Beach Circuit Court. The Court currently has eight judges. I clerk for three of them.

Ruth Payne: What type of work do you do on a day-to-day basis?

Claire Kenny: It's mostly research and writing. A lot of my job is preparing for when one of my judges has "duty week." Most of the time the judges have a trial docket, but they rotate so that one judge per week has the duty docket. The duty judge decides various motions or matters that will take less than an hour. I prepare memos for the more complicated matters and make sure the judge is prepared for anything that may come up at the hearings. It means researching and writing about issues in all sorts of areas of law. I also review orders submitted to the court, draft letter opinions, review model jury instructions, and deal with issues that may come during a trial.

Ruth Payne: Has anything about the work surprised you? What do you think is the most important thing you have learned on the job so far?

Claire Kenny: There was a lot that surprised me when I started. I didn't know much about the state court system. One thing that surprised me is how busy it is. It's been really good practice learning to work in a fast-paced environment. There is always a lot to do. I'd guess that on average I write four to six memos a week, each on different areas of law. There are multiple trials almost every day, so if we have time, we can watch opening or closing arguments, or a whole trial. The most important thing I've learned -- I guess it would be that it's important to be courteous to opposing counsel, judges, and courthouse staff. Be reasonable and don't waste the judge's time. You don't want to develop a reputation for being rude -- and word can travel fast.

Ruth Payne: Switching gears a little, can you tell me about what you will be doing next year?

Claire Kenny: I'm going to be an Honors Attorney for the Department of Labor in DC.

Ruth Payne: Did you know that you would have that job when you started the clerkship?

Claire Kenny: No. I applied for it in October of last year and got an offer in December.

Ruth Payne: Do you think having had the clerkship helped you get the job, either experience-wise or timing-wise?

Claire Kenny: I think it helped experience-wise. I'm a better candidate this year because I can talk about all the research and writing skills I've been developing, and can talk about some of the insight I've gotten into judicial decision-making. I got more "bites" this year than last year.

Ruth Payne: Thanks, Claire. Once last question: Do you have any words of advice for students who might feel hesitant about applying to state court clerkships?

Claire Kenny: I'd definitely recommend doing it. I hesitated a little about pursuing a state court clerkship because I knew I was interested in federal government jobs and I wasn't sure how having a state clerkship would look. I am so glad I did decide to clerk though. It's a lot of fun and it is a great learning experience. It's an awesome first job to have out of law school.

Ruth Payne: Thanks, Claire. That is very helpful. And thanks for being willing to do this.