

Hope Johnson

Judge David C. Norton's Chambers

This summer I had the unique pleasure of interning at the Federal Courthouse in the District of South Carolina. Working for the Honorable David C. Norton, the Chief Federal Judge in Charleston taught me many new things about the legal world, and what it takes to become a successful lawyer. Each day I was able to attend trials, motions, plea bargains and sentencing with Judge Norton or any of the other federal judges in the building. Watching a criminal get sentenced to prison time was emotional yet exciting. I became well acquainted with our country's justice system and saw just how it works. I was also able to attend trials spanning multiple days, or even weeks, with a jury. These cases were of a wide variety such as, tax and drug conspiracies and sexual assault in the workplace. I learned something new each day whether it was simple courtroom demeanor, the way lawyers speak to the jury, how the judge interacts with the jury, the lawyers, and the defendant, and even just simply the procedures of the court. I watched as lawyers argued with intense passion and emotion, showing how much they cared about their side of the case. The Judge talked to the interns after each trial, helping us to understand each step of the process, and explaining why he made each decision and asking if we had any questions. These intimate conversations with the Judge and also with lawyers from both sides after a trial helped me to grasp how hard they really work and how dedicated they are to every individual case.

In the office I had no specific duties, but my options were endless. Because I didn't have the experience of law school I was able to make this internship something unique and special. As the other interns were writing orders, I was able to read orders that were written by clerks that ranged from ten to forty pages in length. I familiarized myself with legal jargon, and even formed a multiple page list of new terms and their definitions. By the end of the summer I was able to use the Westlaw legal research website, and help the interns write their orders. My talks with the two interns in my office who were both law students helped me to prepare for law school and the LSATs. Each of the interns go to different schools, have different unique study habits and each had input of their own. The two law clerks for Judge Norton also had their own opinions about future careers and life after college. This internship has opened my eyes to the wide variety of careers that a law degree will provide, and has taught me more than I would have ever expected about the justice system, and the path to becoming a lawyer.