



Interning for a Criminal Defense Attorney in Chicago



Nicole Pysz, Undergraduate Student & Recipient of Mellon Unpaid Academic Internship Award
Loyola University Chicago, Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology

MASSARELLO LAW, LLC

Attorney Nichole Massarello practices criminal defense in Chicago and its suburbs. She focuses on a variety of cases, including misdemeanors, felonies, expungements, and clemencies.



POSITION & HOURS

I started working as an unpaid intern for Ms. Massarello in June of 2022, a position I held for 6 months working upwards of 24 hours per week. Since then, I have received a promotion to part-time employee due to my hard work and dedication. I have also secured a job under Ms. Massarello's colleague, Attorney Nate Neisan, who also practices criminal defense in the same office suite. I will begin working full-time for both attorneys starting May 15th.

WHY A LEGAL INTERNSHIP?

My ultimate goal is to practice law, which is a goal I have had since I was 10 years old. This stems mostly from my own experience with the immigration process, as most of my family either lives in Poland or has moved to the Chicago suburbs from Poland. After gaining knowledge from Loyola's criminal justice programs, my desire to help people has expanded to not only helping immigrants, but to also help those faced with hardship due to trauma and systemic injustices. I added a double major of Psychology (BS) in order to supplement my future work as a defense attorney. I felt the only way to gain more experience in the field of criminal justice and law was to immerse myself in it completely by obtaining and criminal defense internship in Chicago.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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MY TASKS

- Preparing motions and subpoenas
- Drafting mitigation letters
- Interviewing clients
- Video transcriptions and summaries
- Reviewing case discovery
- Research for a variety of case issues
- Preparing case files
- Managing client payments
- Tending to client questions and concerns
- Filing and scanning

Occasionally, Ms. Massarello brings me with her to assist in court. I have been to pre-trial and clemency hearings, both of which have given me a more practical look at how courtrooms operate, how attorneys carry themselves in court, and the many other nuances that come with handling different cases. This knowledge will be extremely useful when I eventually start my own legal career.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

The most important thing that I have learned is that there is so much work needed to improve the criminal justice system. As someone who is in constant contact with law enforcement and court staff, many changes are needed in order for defendants to truly be receiving fair treatment. Most, if not all, of our clients suffer from some form of childhood trauma or medical/mental health issues that have led to their case or that were caused by their experience in the system. There is rarely ever anything done to help our clients with these issues during or after their case.

I have learned that there are no consequences for law enforcement officers or States Attorneys to be late on sending vital documents. Judges can and will dismiss any evidence they can that may help a defendant's case. Any possible way to prolong a defendant's case will be done. The only people receiving consequences for these actions are the defendants as they sit in jail or prison awaiting their own justice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If it were not for the Mellon Scholarship, I would not have had the financial means to keep an unpaid internship for 6 months, so I am very grateful for the support of the Mellon Foundation.

I am also grateful to Ms. Massarello for teaching me everything I know about working as a lawyer. She is truly one of the most hard-working and detail-oriented people I know, which has taught me so much about how seriously I must take my job both now as an intern and in the future as a lawyer. Ms. Massarello always reminds me that our clients' lives and futures are at stake if any mistakes are made. This heavy burden inspires me to put all of my effort into my work and to keep working towards my goals in law school.

To follow along on my legal education journey, reach out to me on LinkedIn!