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Andrew Clark

Roger Williams University School of Law

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September 4, 2024

Law School News

TRANSFORMING ADVERSITY INTO ADVOCACY

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Andrew Clark



Growing up in a neighborhood in Denver marked by socioeconomic disparities and systemic injustices, 3L Samantha Lobato witnessed the legal system's profound power on the country's most vulnerable communities. It was this experience that drove Lobato to pursue a legal career, one that she plans on dedicating to serving low-income and marginalized communities.

When Lobato was in college, her mother faced first-degree murder charges in a domestic violence case, completely turning her world upside down. During this time, Lobato said that watching firsthand the impact that truly dedicated attorneys can have made a profound impact on her.

“It was a time of immense fear, uncertainty, and despair for our family,” said Lobato, who spent this past summer as an intern at Colorado Legal Services, a non-profit that provides free legal services to low-income residents.

“Amid this turmoil, the public defenders assigned to her case became a beacon of hope and an unwavering advocate for justice. The public defender took on my mother's case with a dedication

and tenacity that went far beyond the call of duty. They understood that the stakes were incredibly high, and they approached the case with a sense of urgency and commitment that was both inspiring and reassuring.”

She noted that this time in her life profoundly shaped her understanding of the importance of public defenders in our justice system. It also highlighted for her the critical role they play in ensuring that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, have access to a fair defense.

This past summer, Lobato interned with the Health Elder Law Unit at Colorado Legal Services. In her role, she conducted legal research regarding Medicaid waivers in Colorado, focusing on Section 1115, 1915(b), and 1915(c).

“I have sought out practical experiences that align with my personal lived experiences and my dedication to public service,” she said.

As someone living with a physical disability, Lobato said that understanding the intricacies of Medicaid waivers is important to her. She feels that this research can inform advocacy efforts to improve and expand Medicaid programs, ensuring that individuals like herself receive comprehensive and quality care.

“This internship has not only honed my legal skills but has also reinforced my commitment to fighting for the rights of those who cannot afford private counsel,” Lobato said.

In addition to her work at Colorado Legal Services, Lobato has also participated in Roger Williams Law’s Street Law program, where students teach law, democracy, and human rights in local inner-city high schools.

“Participating in the Street Law program has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my time at Roger Williams University School of Law,” she said.

“Through this pro bono opportunity, I had the chance to conduct workshops with middle school students, educating them about the legal system and their constitutional rights as students.

These workshops aimed to demystify the law and empower young people with knowledge about their rights and responsibilities.”

Lobato said that she covered essential topics such as freedom of speech, the right to privacy, and the importance of due process. According to Lobato, engaging the students in interactive activities and discussion helped them understand how the law impacts their daily lives and how they can exercise their rights effectively.

“This experience was not only beneficial for the students but also immensely valuable for me. It enhanced my ability to communicate complex legal concepts in a clear and accessible manner, a skill that is crucial for any aspiring lawyer. Additionally, working with the students reinforced

the importance of legal education and community outreach, underscoring the role of lawyers as educators and advocates for justice.”

After graduating next year, Lobato said that she is interested in pursuing public interest law and direct service with marginalized and vulnerable communities. Public interest law appeals to her because it allows her to take her personal lived experiences and offer an informed perspective on these systems. Lobato said that she finds the dynamic and evolving nature of public interest to be both challenging and exciting. In fact, she has curated her time at Roger Williams Law to put her on the right path to pursue this career, as she says that her coursework and internships have given her a solid foundation in what it means to be a public interest attorney.

“I am not sure exactly where I’ll wind up, but the school of law has opened my perspective to the wide possibilities and opportunities that are out there as a public interest attorney,” said Lobato.

“In the long term, I aim to dedicate my life and career to public interest law. I am committed to using my legal skills to serve marginalized and vulnerable communities that are deserving of a strong advocate. Overall, my experiences at Roger Williams University School of Law have equipped me with the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue these goals, and I am excited about the opportunities ahead to make a meaningful impact in the legal field.”