

MEMORANDUM

To: Virginia Law Alumni
Date: March 20, 2009
Re: Public Service Job search resources

This memorandum is for Virginia Law Alumni considering a career in public service. Inasmuch as the public service sector is broadly defined and includes a variety of potential employers, this memo will help you navigate the various options available to you.

The first resource you should review is the Public Service Center's [website](#) and its blog, [Public Works](#) on the Virginia Law [home page](#). On the Center's page, the link to the [Employment Resources page](#) will provide you several helpful resources. If you are not familiar with the public service job search, the [Job Search Resource Guide](#) (available in the Employment Resources folder) offers helpful advice on what constitutes public service law, suggestions on how to assess your interests, how to find your niche, searching the market, marketing yourself to various public service employers, and sample resumes.

Following is a summary of a few other resources you should consider during your search. If you wish to discuss your job search with us, please feel free to contact us at publicservicelaw@vignia.edu or at (434) 924-3883.

I. WORKING FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

A. OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

The official employment website for federal government is USAJOBS.gov. While many federal agencies fill their vacancies by allowing applicants to contact them directly, Congress has charged the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to post all vacancies for competitive civil service positions lasting more than 120 days. OPM does so on its website, USAJOBS. Bear in mind that for purposes of the OPM announcements, the posting "agency" is the parent agency – i.e., Treasury, and not the IRS. We advise our graduates to visit the websites of those sub-agencies.

For those who are currently clerking for judges, the Employment Resources page on our website provides a link to the *Government Honors and Internship Handbook*. Regularly updated, the handbook includes information on honors programs offered by many state and federal government agencies for outgoing law clerks.

Another useful resource, also available in the Employment Resources page, is the National Association of Law Placement's (NALP) [Federal Legal Employment Opportunity Guide](#). The NALP Guide provides helpful descriptions of many federal agencies and their departments. Replete with profiles and testimonials of government attorneys, the guide offers a significant amount of information that will assist you in exploring the federal government as a potential employer.

Public Works has several postings on how to find work with federal agencies. Click on the "Federal Government" category on the right hand column and you will find several entries you may find helpful, including [Lawyers in the Executive Department](#) and [National Security Lawyers](#).

While the above resources are indispensable, a most valuable resource available to graduates of the Law School is [PSLawNet](#) – the Public Service Law Network, an online clearinghouse that lists opportunities and information on employers. Opportunities in the PSLawNet database include jobs with the federal government. Registration on PSLawNet is free for students and graduates of the Law School.

B. OPPORTUNITIES ON CAPITOL HILL

The quickest way to find a job in Congress is through personal contacts; however, when such contacts are not available, applicants often start their careers on the Hill by applying directly to members' personal offices. Applications for staff positions with congresspersons or Committees, including the Senate and House Judiciary Committees are considered through members' personal offices. Prior experience on Capitol Hill is often helpful to obtaining these competitive positions; however, there are frequent openings for legislative assistants with no prior Hill experience.

Several resources are available online. We recommend you start with our blog postings [Lawyers in the Legislative Branch of the Federal Government](#) and [How to Find a Job on the Hill](#). We have also found the following online sources helpful: [Congressional Quarterly](#), [The Hill](#), [RCJobs](#), [OpaJobs](#), and [HillZoo](#).

II. OPPORTUNITIES WITH STATE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Unlike the federal government that has created a centralized job database, there is no similar resource for those who seek positions with state government agencies. However, two organizations have compiled helpful resources for such job seekers: [GovJobs.com](#) and [StateLocalGov.net](#). Both websites offer links to state and county agencies in almost every state.

III. WORKING FOR PUBLIC DEFENDER AND PROSECUTOR OFFICES

A. WORKING FOR A PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE (PDO)

State PDOs generally applicants who have gained admission to the bar. Applicants who have litigation experience, moot court, clinical work, or other experience in oral advocacy and a demonstrated passion to work as advocates in our criminal justice system, which includes a desire to protect the constitutional rights of the accused, are most competitive. However, PDOs, especially those that serve smaller and rural communities frequently hire attorneys with no prior experience.

Federal public defender offices are the counterparts of U.S. Attorney's Offices and have jurisdiction over cases in federal court. Federal PDOs hire attorneys with several years of criminal litigation experience.

If you are considering working for a state or federal PDO, start by reviewing [PSLawNet's Prosecutor/Public Defender page](#) online. Please note that Virginia Law's *How to get a Job in a Public Defender Office* guide is one of the resources listed on that page. Links provided in the left hand column of *Public Works* under "Public Defender Resources" are also helpful.

Once you create a list of PDOs where you want to work, please contact our office to check if fellow Virginia Law alumni work in those offices. We will also be happy to review your application materials.

B. WORKING FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY, ATTORNEY GENERAL, AND UNITED STATES ATTORNEY OFFICES

In many states, criminal prosecution is bifurcated into two administrative entities—in District Attorney (DA) and Attorney General (AG) offices. In some states, AG offices do not prosecute criminal cases and only enforce state civil laws. The local DAs will handle all "routine" criminal cases, while AG offices typically handle cases with broader or "statewide" impact.

If you are considering work in this area, again, please review PSLawNet's Prosecutor/Public Defender page. We also suggest you read the Public Service Center's [How to Obtain a Job in a Prosecutor's Office](#), available on the Center's website. The handbook offers helpful advice on how to select a DA's office that is right for you, how to develop a prosecution-oriented resume, and how to approach your job interview.

A helpful resource that will allow you to identify state and local prosecutor offices and AG offices is [Prosecutor.info](#), an online compendium of prosecutor offices around the country assembled by the Eaton County Prosecutor's Office.

In the federal regime, United States Attorneys have jurisdiction over federal crimes and select federal civil cases. United States Attorneys represent the federal government in federal trial and appellate courts (up to U.S. courts of appeal). There are a total of ninety-three U.S. Attorney Offices (USAOs) assigned throughout the country. A comprehensive list of US Attorneys is [available online](#) through the Department of Justice. USAOs generally require new hires to have completed either a federal judicial clerkship or have 2-5 years of legal experience.

Again, once you have compiled a list of DA/AG/USAO offices that interest you, please contact us if you would like assistance with your application.

IV. WORKING FOR PUBLIC INTEREST ORGANIZATIONS

There are numerous types of public interest organizations that fit under the public interest umbrella. We have found it helpful to conceptualize these organizations under two categories: organizations that provide direct client services and organizations that focus primarily on impact litigation, policy, and advocacy.

A. DIRECT CLIENT SERVICES

Legal services attorneys provide representation to indigent clients on a variety of civil issues, including poverty law, public benefits, domestic relations, bankruptcy, consumer law, and landlord/tenant law. While the starting salaries are not high, these employers offer new attorneys early responsibility and the ability to make a real difference in the lives of people who are not otherwise able to afford legal representation.

Much like public defenders and prosecutors, legal services attorneys are in court on a regular basis. These attorneys also have unparalleled client contact. You will be given responsibility very early on – even new legal services attorneys begin handling their own caseloads and appearing in court within a few weeks of starting their jobs. An important skill for all legal services attorneys to possess is the ability to feel comfortable with a wide variety of people from a range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Given the wide range of substantive areas of the law involved, legal services programs are different and you need to find the right practice area and office for you. We recommend you start your job search by reviewing PSLawNet's [NonProfit Public Interest Careers page](#) and the Public Service Center's [How to Get a Job in Legal Services](#).

B. IMPACT LITIGATION, POLICY, AND ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

Some legal organizations primarily conduct impact litigation – matters that affect a group of people with a particular issue in common. Examples of these types of organizations include the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services, the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human

Rights, and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. There are virtually hundreds of these types of organizations. PSLawNet and [Idealist](#) are excellent resources to help you identify these organizations in the geographic area(s) of your interest.

Again, once you create a list of legal aid offices and advocacy organizations where you want to work, please contact us if you have questions or would like further assistance with your application.

V. OPPORTUNITIES IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

The [Human Rights Program](#) is the hub for human rights activities at Virginia Law. The Program Director, Professor Deena Hurwitz, offers mentoring to students and graduates to help find internships in international human rights law. If you wish to be included in the Program's Human Rights Listserv, which includes frequent postings on job openings in human rights, please contact Cindy Derrick (cal7y@virginia.edu).

I hope you find the above summary helpful. If you wish to discuss the various options available to you in the public sector, please do not hesitate to contact us. If you e-mail us to arrange a counseling appointment, please remember to include your updated resume and to indicate the days and hours that work best for you.