

3L Sample Cover Letters

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Center for Popular Democracy
449 Troutman Street
Brooklyn, NY 11237

Dear Kumar Rao,

I am a rising third-year student at New York University School of Law, and I am writing to express my interest in a fall term internship with The Center for Popular Democracy. I am committed to understanding how the most marginalized people experience the world and making sure that this informs the steps we take to create a better one. This internship would provide an incredible opportunity to deepen that understanding.

I chose to go to law school after working on policy development at the Center for American Progress. My portfolio spanned race, poverty, child development, and early childhood education. Each day, I went to work at the “tank” with an eye toward stretching our ability to do the “think” part of the job. When my team would discuss the reauthorization of Head Start—a program that all my siblings benefitted from and the backdrop of some of my earliest memories—the significance of making sure our policy recommendations worked for actual people was never lost on me. In working through policy problems and solutions, the criminal legal system was never far away. It was impossible to discuss ways to improve the lived experiences of black and brown children, families, and communities without acknowledging the system designed to subjugate them. This reality guided me to law school and, ultimately, to public interest work focused on the criminal legal system.

I spent my law school summers in Oklahoma and Louisiana—states that have taken turns as the world’s prison capital. At Still She Rises, Tulsa, I met each one of the clients I would get to know at the Tulsa County Jail. By the time I met them, they all had been deprived of something. I watched closely as attorneys used every decision point to prevent any further deprivation. I grew to love this work when it meant researching and writing motions, helping with investigations, and preparing for preliminary hearings and trial, or when it meant calling a client’s boss and pleading with them to hold her job. Similarly, as a Law Clerk at Orleans Public Defenders, I worked with different constellations of investigators, client advocates, social workers, and attorneys, supporting clients at every stage of a case. Though “zealous” is a word often used to define a style of defense, these places taught me that it is the only option when the stakes are someone’s life and liberty.

Working with public defenders has taught me so much about how to hold the line but my policy background keeps me looking for opportunities to draw the line and proactively build power in communities. I had the opportunity to start practicing this by developing a Tulsa-specific Know Your Rights training tool, which provided a new space for high-school students to talk about and organize around policing and racism. I also helped spearhead *100 Books for 100 Women*, a book drive for our clients, primarily focused on titles written by women of color.

Where the traditional law school curriculum can fail to value and cultivate intersectional thinking, my Criminal Defense & Reentry Clinic and the Arthur Garfield Hays Civil Liberties Program have been homes for learning how to use every avenue and every tool in the fight for racial justice. Together, they push me to be the type of lawyer who aligns herself with and learns from organizers, storytellers, policy experts, as well as the directly impacted amongst and beyond those groups. CPD is a beacon for this type of thinking and approach to lawyering. I hope to have the opportunity to bring my energy and skills to the wealth of knowledge and experience at CPD.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

3L Student Name

August 22, 2018

James O'Connor
Chief Deputy Public Defender
Colorado State Public Defender
1300 Broadway, Suite 400
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Mr. O'Connor:

I am a third-year student at New York University School of Law, and I am very interested in joining the Colorado State Public Defender in the fall of 2019. During my Peace Corps Service in Ethiopia, I spoke often with my Ethiopian friends and colleagues about American history and politics, as one of the organization's goals was to share American culture. One recurring issue in these conversations was the utter scale and inhumanity of our criminal justice system. These conversations were the spark that led me to law school with the goal of becoming a public defender. I have since dedicated myself to becoming a zealous and compassionate public defender and I am eager to apply the lessons I have learned in law school with your office after graduation.

As a law student, I have internalized crucial public defense skills while serving clients. I spent this summer at the Dover office of the New Hampshire Public Defender. As a certified Rule 36 intern, I directly represented clients in bail and sentencing hearings and prepared four trials for adult and juvenile clients. I formed strong relationships with clients and learned how to effectively humanize their struggles and lives to persuade judges and prosecutors. Given the extreme opioid crisis in New Hampshire, I often advocated for my clients in creative ways, such as making sure they could seek substance abuse treatment while on bail. The office's dedication to its clients inspired me to work harder to accomplish their goals every day.

Prior to this summer, I gained the practical and doctrinal knowledge necessary to assist people facing the onerous consequences of the criminal justice system. In the Federal Defender Clinic, I negotiated with federal agency officials to achieve favorable outcomes for clients charged with misdemeanors. I applied those tactics directly in New Hampshire when persuading prosecutors to modify bail and plea agreements. Furthermore, when writing questions and closing arguments for trials, the cross examination and oral advocacy abilities that I developed in the clinic seminar were invaluable. Additionally, my coursework in Evidence and Criminal Procedure formed the backbone of every motion I wrote and every objection argument I prepared. Lastly, the research and writing experience that I gained last summer as an appellate clerk with the Rhode Island Public Defender helped me to craft compelling narratives and legal arguments. Seeing these lessons have practical application in my work enhanced my passion to become a better advocate each day and into my 3L year.

This coming school year, I will continue my hands-on education in the Juvenile Defender Clinic, where I will represent children charged with crimes and hone my ability to work with clients and litigate trials and hearings. In this clinic, I will build on the skills I have developed with the Suspension Representation Project (SRP), working with young people affected by the school-to-prison pipeline. As an advocate with SRP, I represent students in administrative suspension hearings, microcosms of criminal proceedings: the standard of proof is heavily stacked against students, and their rights are often disrespected. I served as the Deputy Director of SRP as a 2L, training and overseeing a consortium of 900 advocates across five law schools. I look forward to continuing to serve that mission in the clinic this year while refining integral trial abilities that I will use after graduation.

My educational and professional experiences have shown me the importance of pairing my passion for public defense with a commensurate dedication to improving my abilities. I am eager to continue that journey and represent clients in Colorado while learning from exceptional trial attorneys. Your office's dedication to protecting clients' rights via trial and litigation is particularly appealing. I would be honored to join the Colorado Public Defender next year and contribute to that mission.

Sincerely,

3L Student Name

December 3, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to apply for the 2016 International Refugee Rights Legal Fellowship with International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) and the UNHCR. When Lara Finkbeiner emailed me about this new project, I was immediately drawn to the fellowship, and I am very excited to apply.

I began working with IRAP when I started law school at NYU Law in September 2013. Over the last few years, I have engaged with IRAP on a variety of different levels – first as a student advocate and Jordan trip participant, then as the NYU Law chapter chair, and now as part of the pilot intake interview program. I have also done two radio engagements on behalf of IRAP, and have partnered more informally regarding strategies for clients and potential clients in Turkey. Being a part of IRAP in various capacities has been immensely meaningful and rewarding for me, and I would be honored to partner with IRAP again on this new program with the UNHCR.

During my first summer of law school, I interned with the UNHCR office in Ankara, Turkey. At that office I participated in trainings with the Protection Unit. I was able to sit in on a number of RSD interviews and review the status determination reports completed from those interviews. I also did country of origin information research on Afghanistan, illustrating the worsening humanitarian situation in the country throughout 2014.

My passion for international work and travel extends beyond my previous work with IRAP and UNHCR. Although I am an American citizen, I spent the first half of my life living in Europe, and as such have always had a very global sense of my identity and my desired career. As an adult, I have spent significant time in South Africa (one year, studying, conducting research and working with a refugee-rights organization), Rwanda (6 months, working with a local NGO), and will live in Argentina from January through May of 2016. In addition to my longer-term experiences abroad, I have conducted research and traveled extensively throughout the world, and I am adept at adjusting to new places and experiences. I also speak fluent German, and intermediate French and Spanish.

I am by nature a proactive, enthusiastic, driven person with the ability to see both the details and the larger picture, and work well in both team and individual settings. Through my previous work, I have honed my creative problem-solving and have developed a strong background in cross-cultural communication and international collaboration. I care passionately about refugee issues, and I hope to engage in this sort of work throughout my career.

I would be happy to discuss my qualifications and interest in this placement with you further. I am available by phone at PHONE, or by email at EMAIL.

Sincerely,

3L Student Name

Jennifer Thomas, Director of Legal Recruiting
Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia
633 Indiana Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Ms. Thomas,

I am a third-year student at New York University School of Law, and I am writing to express my interest in joining the Public Defender Service as a staff attorney upon graduation. As a Root-Tilden-Kern scholar at NYU, I am committed to a career in public interest law, and I am eager to begin that work in D.C.

Before law school, I taught high school English for four years in the Mississippi Delta and in Newark. I left teaching not because I was disillusioned with education, but because I was struck by the degree to which my students' achievements in the classroom and beyond were threatened by the criminal justice system. For my students and their family members who had to negotiate probation officers, police frisks, and court fees, legal advocacy seemed as essential to their success as academic support.

When I came to law school, I was driven by a desire to provide the legal "urgent care" that some of my students and their families needed. Initially—albeit naively—I understood "urgent care" to mean only effective courtroom advocacy, and I focused on acquiring those necessary skills. I was introduced to trial skills as an advocate and intake manager for the Suspension Representation Project (SRP), representing students in New York public school suspension proceedings, and I continued to practice those skills in NYU's Criminal Defense & Reentry Clinic simulations last year.

I have learned, however, that effective legal advocacy extends far beyond strong cross-examination. This is not to diminish the importance of trial skills: at the Mecklenburg County Public Defender's Office this summer, my responsibilities included negotiating with district attorneys; conducting bond hearings and plea colloquies; and even conducting a bench trial in its entirety. But I now understand the importance of advocating for our clients outside of the courtroom and of considering the larger context of the challenges they face. During my 1L summer at the Bronx Defenders, my supervising attorneys encouraged me to collaborate with social workers and parent advocates to find education and child care programs that would address our clients' longer-term needs.

I have also come to understand that effective legal advocacy involves challenging inequities in the system itself. At Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS), where I performed clinic fieldwork, I led our clinic's effort to help BDS build its "bad cop" database to expose abuses of police authority. I organized interviews with forty attorneys, combed through trial transcripts to find impeachment material, and researched how BDS could use that information to change NYPD practices. I did similar work in Mecklenburg this summer, compiling data on the arrest policies of Charlotte's transit officers for use in an eventual database.

I want to be an effective trial attorney, but I also want to help clients beyond their "urgent care" needs. Your office has a reputation for providing excellent training for trial attorneys while at the same time challenging the systemic ills within the D.C. criminal justice system. I hope to be part of an ethos that celebrates direct, immediate advocacy as well as attention to long-term reform.

Thank you for your consideration.

3L Student Name

3L STUDENT NAME

Address • Phone • Email

September 8, 2015

Mr. Willie Mays Jones
Legal Hiring Coordinator
Brooklyn District Attorney's Office
350 Jay Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am a third year student at New York University School of Law, and I am very interested in being considered for an Assistant District Attorney position in the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office. Throughout law school I have demonstrated strength as an oral advocate, immersed myself in criminal law, and sought out litigation experience. In addition to my background, I believe that my passion for public service and my dedication to criminal justice would enable me to succeed as an Assistant District Attorney.

Participating in NYU's clinic with the New York County District Attorney's Office reinforced my commitment to a career in prosecution. I observed Assistant District Attorneys at work during all phases of adjudication, from preliminary interviews in the Early Case Assessment Bureau to summations. Viewing jury trials helped me to develop my oral advocacy skills, which I honed while advancing to the semifinals of NYU's yearlong moot court competition. My strong academic background in Criminal Procedure and Evidence allowed me to provide Assistant District Attorneys with memoranda addressing time-sensitive questions.

I spent this past summer at a major law firm, where I devoted substantial time to a pro bono client appealing his murder conviction. While I was fortunate to receive an offer to join the firm permanently, I am committed to pursuing a career in public service. I am confident that my communication skills and temperament would make me a valuable contributor in a fast-paced environment where each day brings unique challenges.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you further about my qualifications during an on-campus interview. My resume is attached. Thank you very much for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

3L Student

Address
Phone Number
Email Address

September 6, 2015

Ms. Michele McKenzie
Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc.
225 Broadway
Suite 900
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Ms. McKenzie:

I am a third year law student at New York University School of Law, and I am writing with great interest in a trial attorney position at the Federal Defenders of San Diego, beginning in 2016. I went to high school in southern California and have family in Solana Beach. I greatly admire the Federal Defenders' commitment to exemplary client representation, and I am confident that my passion for working with clients, my defense experience and my oral advocacy skills will enable me to thrive as a public defender in San Diego.

I have gained extensive defense experience while working hard to advocate on behalf of my clients. This past summer, I interned at the Alaska Public Defender Agency in Bethel, Alaska, under the Alaska student practice law. The Bethel office oversees cases for an area roughly the size of Oregon, and I managed my own caseload of misdemeanor clients, practicing in court and handling everything from bail modification hearings to preparing for trial. I built close relationships with my clients, developed case plans with our social worker, and strategized how to negotiate the best plea deal for my client—through motion practice, investigation, or simply by being more prepared than the DA to push a case to trial. I became comfortable responding to the court on the spot, arguing objections, and cross-examining witnesses. One highlight of my summer was cross-examining an expert witness in a superior court trial. I am prepared to handle my own caseload as an attorney next year because I practiced as an attorney this past summer.

Last year, as an intern for the Youth Law Practice at Neighborhood Defender Services of Harlem, I learned litigation strategies for some of the most serious crimes youth charged as adults face in our criminal justice system. I observed Youth Court every Friday, worked with clients in pre-trial detention, and ultimately second-chaired a felony assault trial in Superior Court. This year as a student in the Juvenile Defender Clinic, I look forward to honing my litigation strategies.

My passion for holistic public defense and my devotion to client-centered advocacy would enable me to make a valuable contribution at the Federal Defenders of San Diego. I hope to have the opportunity to speak with you at the EJW Career Fair. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

3L Student Name

Enclosure

Name
Address
Phone
Email

January 14, 2016

Mr. Victor Black
Legal Aid Society of Ohio
924 Bethel Street
Cleveland, OH 96813

Dear Mr. Black:

I am a third year law student at New York University School of Law and I am extremely interested in being considered for an entry-level position at any of your offices. I will be graduating in May 2016 and plan to take the July Ohio Bar exam. One of your staff attorneys, Lisa Smith, who also graduated from New York University School of Law, suggested that I write to you. I believe that my broad range of advocacy skills and substantial expertise in poverty law will enable me to contribute effectively to the work of your office.

I grew up in an immigrant family where my father has a chronic illness and my mother is a survivor of cancer. The many challenges we faced as a low-income family struggling with health care issues and debt have made me a passionate and tireless advocate for those who find themselves in similar situations.

During law school I have gained experience in direct advocacy for low-income clients, from client interviewing to negotiation to administrative hearings. While interning at Legal Aid, I successfully advocated on behalf of an uninsured domestic worker with over twenty thousand dollars worth of hospital bills to have the hospital reduce her payments. I also successfully represented individual clients at administrative hearings, including a complex case involving a managed long-term care plan. This year in NYU Law's Immigrant Rights Clinic, I am applying for a discretionary waiver on behalf of a client in removal proceedings. I am representing him at his hearing before an immigration judge, briefing a complicated issue of law, and preparing testimony and oral arguments.

My substantial research and writing skills will enable me to quickly produce motions and briefs in a fast-paced legal aid office. For example, during my first summer of law school at Planned Parenthood, I researched and wrote educational materials pertaining to emergency contraception, and at Legal Aid I helped write a Title VI discrimination complaint based on the lack of interpreter services at local hospitals.

I am eager to contribute my knowledge, skills, and experience to the work of your office. I look forward to hearing from you and have included my resume and references as well as a writing sample.

Sincerely,

3L Student Name