

# Alumni Sample Cover Letters

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Revised December 2018

October 20, 2016

Joy Gossman  
Public Defender  
Lake County Public Defender  
15 South County Street  
Waukegan, IL 60085

Dear Ms. Gossman:

I am a public interest lawyer who recently returned to the Chicago area, and I am extremely interested in the Assistant Public Defender position with the Lake County Public Defender. Given my extensive experience in public defense and my passion for representing indigent clients accused of crimes, I know that I would be able to contribute meaningfully to the office's exceptional representation of its clients.

Through my professional experience, I have acquired a range of skills essential to representing the indigent accused. As an Assistant Public Defender in Florida's 15th Judicial Circuit, I handled hundreds of criminal cases from arraignment to final disposition. The extensive amount of time that I spent in court advocating for clients makes me well-equipped to represent the Lake County Public Defender's clients in their criminal cases. In addition, while I tried over 20 criminal cases in front of a jury, the vast majority of my cases were resolved short of trial. Resolving cases in ways that were favorable to my clients required me to communicate and coordinate efforts with prosecutors, police officers, victims, clients' family members, and representatives from treatment centers and social services organizations. The experience that I gained negotiating with so many different actors will serve me well as I negotiate case resolutions as a Lake County Assistant Public Defender. Finally, I honed strong research and writing skills, drafting numerous motions and appellate briefs, which I hope to put to use as an attorney in your office.

During law school, my clinic and internships helped me to establish a strong foundation in the representation of poor clients. At The Bronx Defenders, I worked with clients to assess their needs and provided them with guidance, thereby developing vital counseling skills and improving my ability to build relationships with clients of different cultures and backgrounds. As an advocate in the Federal Defender Clinic at NYU, I developed indispensable trial advocacy skills as I represented clients in multiple bench trials in federal court. Lastly, while interning at Cabrini Green Legal Aid, I improved my written advocacy skills as I drafted a post-trial motion asserting juror misconduct that succeeded in securing a new eviction trial for our client in public housing.

The criminal justice system in the United States is broken. As a society, we criminalize too much – both by labeling any conduct deemed to be problematic as “criminal” and also by punishing criminal conduct much too harshly. The burdens of over-criminalization are borne almost entirely by people of color and the poor. I am committed to spending my career lending dignity to indigent clients accused of crimes and to zealously advocating for their liberty. It would be an honor to advocate for the rights of the accused among the ranks of the Lake County Public Defender.

I would love to have the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications in greater detail, and I am available at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alumnus/a Name

June 22, 2016

Jose Guzman  
Assistant Public Defender  
Santa Clara County Public Defender  
120 W. Mission St.  
San Jose, CA 95110

Dear Mr. Guzman:

I have been a federal public defender for nearly seven years. I love being a public defender and fighting the government on behalf of my clients. We are on the front lines of a war against overly punitive criminal laws and ever-expanding prosecutorial power. My family is relocating to the San Francisco Bay Area in August, so, regrettably, I am leaving my current position in San Diego. Your office is one of the most respected in California and in the country; it would be a privilege to join your team as a Deputy Public Defender.

As a trial attorney with Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc. (FSDSI), I have handled a diverse caseload including drug, immigration, fraud, sex-trafficking, child pornography, and habeas cases. During my time at FSDSI, I have conducted sixteen felony jury trials, filed four Ninth Circuit appeals and argued two, and litigated a variety of motions. But trial, motion, and appellate work are only a small fraction of the day-to-day of a public defender. Most of my time is spent negotiating favorable plea agreements and arguing sentencing mitigation. I spend countless hours in jail counseling clients. I travel to Mexico, Arizona, and throughout California to investigate cases for trial and for sentencing mitigation.

Finally, I have benefited tremendously from the training I have received over the past seven years in San Diego. I attended a two-week training at the National Criminal Defense College, a six-day training in forensics hosted by the NACDL, and lengthy trainings on trial skills, cross examination, electronically-stored information, forensics, and immigration. San Diego is one of the only federal offices that hires new attorneys. Being a part of a “training office” also means that for the past several years, I have been mentoring and supervising junior attorneys and leading trainings for other federal defenders and Criminal Justice Act panel attorneys. Sharing knowledge and strategizing about cases with other members of the public defender tribe is one of my favorite parts of the job, and something I will continue to do should I join your office.

Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or email if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Alumnus/a Name

Alumnus/a Name

May 23, 2018

Hina Shamsi  
Director, National Security Project  
American Civil Liberties Union  
125 Broad Street, 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10004

Dear Ms. Shamsi:

I write to express my interest in the 2-Year Staff Attorney position with the National Security Project. I am a 2015 graduate of NYU School of Law as well as a former fellow at Human Rights Watch, and I recently completed a clerkship for the Honorable James L. Cott (S.D.N.Y.). I have focused my career on challenging discriminatory and problematic laws and policies, and I have the highest regard for the National Security Project's work fighting for policies that comport with the U.S. Constitution, human rights, and our democratic values. Particularly as the architects and enforcers of some of the most egregious and unlawful policies of prior administrations increasingly assume prominent roles in the current Administration, the critical nature of this work is abundantly clear. I would relish the opportunity to use litigation and advocacy to push for transparency and policy change related to surveillance, detention, profiling, torture, and targeted killings.

I have developed expertise in national security and counterterrorism policies, as well as in government transparency and accountability, through my professional experiences. While at Human Rights Watch, I conducted research on the impact of a counter-extremism strategy in the United Kingdom. In so doing, I gained a greater understanding of the intersection of human rights law with national security and counterterrorism policies. I consulted with a diverse set of stakeholders, including small Muslim community groups, large umbrella organizations, and civil liberties groups. As a clerk to a busy magistrate judge in U.S. federal court, I assisted my judge with FOIA litigation as well as litigation challenging agency action, including suits brought under the Administrative Procedure Act. While in law school, I assisted with the preparation of a lengthy FOIA request, jointly submitted by the ACLU and Human Rights Watch, regarding surveillance programs.

I also have a strong background in developing and managing projects that seek to achieve meaningful policy change and that require sharp research and writing skills. For example, while at Human Rights Watch, I conducted factual and legal research on the mistreatment of unaccompanied immigrant children, authored reports and other written products, and designed and implemented advocacy strategies to end harmful practices like arbitrary detention. As one example, after conducting research and publishing a report in Sweden, I worked with my communications team to craft a media strategy and successfully pitched stories to local and international media. I then led efforts to lobby high-level officials at national agencies. In order to make my work as impactful as possible, I worked with organizers, experts, and civil society groups to ensure that my recommendations were relevant and enjoyed broad support. Similarly, in my two years with NYU's Global Justice Clinic, I designed and led projects to support Haitian community groups who were affected by gold mining. I created resources about rights and mining for a lay audience, designed a survey intended to gather quantitative data about the realization of the right to water, and contributed to a report on the human rights risks of mining. I also enjoy working with clients: while in law school, I advocated for people seeking unemployment insurance before administrative law judges. I went on to lead my school's chapter and eventually the entire city-wide, student-run organization.

Thank you for considering my application. Along with this cover letter, I have submitted my resume, two writing samples, a list of references, and a law school transcript. I would be happy to provide additional materials upon request.

Sincerely,  
Alumnus/a Name