

SUMMER LAW CLERKSHIPS ON CAPITOL HILL

Interested in working on Capitol Hill this summer? This information sheet provides a brief overview of the process and strategies, as well as application tips. You can learn more by discussing your plans with a PILC counselor. And keep in mind that networking and persistence will be key in your search.

Why work on the Hill?

A law clerkship* on the House or Senate Judiciary Committee is an incredible experience. Other committees and personal offices may have summer positions available as well, but the Judiciary Committee offices (and its subcommittee offices) are the only ones that regularly hire law students for legal work (as opposed to pure policy work). If you hope to work on the Hill or a government agency after graduation, a law clerkship will allow you to make invaluable contacts. Even if you don't plan to work in politics later, you can make a difference on cutting-edge legal and policy issues by spending a summer on the Hill.

What do law clerks do?

The work generally involves legal research, policy analysis, and great exposure to politics. Examples of assignments include writing legal memos, monitoring developments in the courts and in the news, briefing Members and / or senior staff, drafting speeches, preparing for congressional hearings, helping draft legislation, etc. The environment is fast-paced and interns who demonstrate they do good work may get significant responsibility.

Do I need to have connections to people on the Hill?

It helps to have connections, though students sometimes get hired without knowing anyone. But don't worry – there are easy ways for you to network! Here are some ideas.

- Your classmates! **Talk to 2L and 3L students** who spent their summers there – you can find their emails in PILC **intern reports**. There are also quite a few 1Ls who worked on the Hill before law school - many are members of **Law Dems** or **Law Republicans**.
- Many faculty members have connections on the Hill, testify about their areas of expertise, etc. Seek out faculty working on issues of interest to you, go to their office hours and ask if they know anyone.
- Get in touch with NYU alumni. PILC counselors have names and contact information.
- Senator Durbin's office (D-IL) has an application process open to anyone – it's best to apply early as spots fill quickly. Applications are at <http://durbin.senate.gov/intern.cfm>; note that you will be using the same application as his undergrad interns but he *does* take law clerks for his Judiciary Subcommittee office on human rights.
- Contact your home members' offices and let them know you are a constituent. You might get a job with them, or they might help you make contacts in other offices. (Members frequently hire clerks from their district for personal offices, although again, personal office work is often less legal in nature. Committees sometimes desire to hire clerks from their member's home state/district as it demonstrates a strong connection, but it is certainly not necessary to get a position.)

* **Why does this sheet refer to law clerkships instead of internships?** On Capitol Hill, the word internship is sometimes reserved for undergraduates. To be safe, state clearly that you want a law clerkship. If you are offered an internship, ask whether it includes substantive legal work before accepting.

Intern Reports

Be sure to read PILC Intern Reports from students who have worked on related issues, see

<https://its.law.nyu.edu/pilc/reports/search.cfm>.

How should I apply?

Be sure to read the web pages of members you are considering, as you will be expected to know what issues are important to them and what their policy priorities are. If you are applying to a (sub)committee office, look at the hearings that office has held recently or has planned for the summer, the legislation being considered at its executive meetings (referred to as “mark-up”), etc. The basic application is a resume and cover letter specifying your interest in the (sub)committee’s work, political loyalty, campaign work, personal contacts, connection with the member and/or state/district, or admiration of the member’s policies. Examples of why you are interested in them could include. “I have long admired Senator Grassley not only for his efforts on behalf of my home state Iowa, but also and especially for his whistleblower laws which have become the federal government’s #1 anti-fraud tool and returned \$22 billion to the Treasury that would otherwise have been lost to fraud.” or “I first learned of Senator Leahy through his work on environmental protection in Vermont. I have followed his work in the Senate for some time now, and find that I agree with virtually all of his positions and I am particularly interested in his creative approach to immigration reform.” (Members may have egos, and it is a good idea to play to that...)

Writing samples, grades, and / or references may be required depending on the office. If you aren’t sure and if you have good ones, there is no harm in including them with your application.

Fax or email your application (there can be interruptions in snail mail due to past anthrax scares). Follow up by phone or email if you haven’t heard anything after a couple weeks, and keep following up to make sure they get back to you in time for the deadline for PILC funding (the ABA advises job seekers to “remain politely persistent at consistent intervals”).

Where do clerks work?

Most clerks work for a particular Member of the Senate or House, either in the member’s personal office or on a committee or sub-committee. Committee work is often the most substantive, and many personal offices only hire undergraduate interns.

On many committees, only the majority and minority leaders or the ranking member hire staff and clerks. The Senate Judiciary Committee is an exception, as every member has staff and law clerks for his/her committee work, with the more senior Senators having more staff and law clerks. Occasionally, students work for non-political, technical staff.

To whom should I address my application?

In a personal office, you can apply to the *chief of staff* or *legislative director*. In a committee (or sub-committee) office, you can apply to the *chief counsel* or *staff director*. Write to the relevant person in a member’s office about that member’s work on the committee (e.g. write to Senator Schumer’s Judiciary Committee Chief Counsel if you are interested in working for him on the Judiciary Committee, or to Senator Menendez’ Legislative Aide for foreign policy if you are interested in working for him on the Foreign Relations Committee.) Do not apply to the ‘intern coordinator’ if you can avoid it, as that person might recruit undergrads (although it is often a good idea to CC your application to that person as he or she is likely to keep better track of incoming applications than the primary person you will be contacting). It never hurts to write to *legislative aides* or *legislative counsels* working on issues of interest to you, as well – the more people who know you, the better your chances.

When you have an idea of which members you wish to contact, you can check the Leadership Directories, <http://www.leadershipdirectories.com>, to find contact names. You may access the site, without a username or password, from any Law School computer, by clicking “Leadership Online Log In” in the top right hand corner. Or go here to access it from non-law school computers: <https://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu/login?url=http://www.leadershipdirectories.com> (click “Log In Here!” to begin).

If you have a name but do not know the email address, the formula for House staffers is first.last@mail.house.gov and the formula for Senate staffers is first_last@membername.senate.gov.

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It is also advisable to ask someone who is helping you to pass your application along if you can. Who delivers it may have direct bearing on where in the stack your resume will fall.

What is the timeframe?

This varies with each office. We advise you to apply as soon as possible after December 1 and keep following up. *If you still have applications pending as the PILC deadline approaches, please email us at pilcgrant@exchange.law.nyu.edu.*

Should I consider a trip to DC?

Yes, although it isn't absolutely necessary. You may want to plan a trip to DC – then call people to whom you sent applications and let them know you will be in town if they want to schedule an interview. Also, it can be a good idea to plan a trip and then schedule “informational meetings” with any contact you have in the office you want to work in, as these will lead to better contacts, or sometimes turn into informal interviews on the spot (hiring can work that way!). Winter or spring break can be a good time to visit DC.

Some Hill staffers have suggested that going down with a bunch of resumes is the best way to get a job. If you start with just a couple contacts in your home members' offices, they can suggest others for you to talk to and they, in turn, will suggest others. You'll be working the halls of power in no time!

How can I assess the quality of a law clerkship?

The best source is PILC intern reports. If there is not a report, ask the office for names / emails of prior interns from other law schools.

Assuming I get a law clerkship, when should I start?

We advise you to start as soon as possible after exams or after the writing competition. Very little happens during the August recess, so it is best to get most of your 10 weeks in before the end of July.

How hard is it to get a law clerkship?

It is very competitive. Also, because each member has his/her own process, the search can be time-consuming and require substantial effort. We can't stress enough: networking and persistence are essential. It is a good idea to have a back-up plan since hiring can be politicized on the Hill, and there is no sure way to get a law clerkship.

What are some back-up plans if I am not successful in my Hill search?

One option is to work with an advocacy organization in DC – if you are passionate about an issue such as environment, women's rights, labor rights, etc., you can help lobby congress. To get a sense of organizations out there, search “legislative/policy” and “Washington, DC” on PSJD. Note that 501(c)(3) organizations are eligible for PILC funding (but 501(c)(4)s and 527s are not).

Alternatively, you can look into working with an executive federal agency. If you work in a legislative or policy office of an agency, you might still get good Hill experience. Even if you don't work in a legislative office, you can still gain solid skills and make DC contacts.

For people who want to work on the Hill later on, working on a campaign is another excellent way to get a foot in the door – in fact, many Hill staffers got their jobs after successful campaigns. However, PILC funding is not available for campaign work due to IRS restrictions.

What additional resources exist to research offices?

A wonderful resource is “Working on Capitol Hill,” published by Yale. This publication includes more detailed information about differences between personal offices and committees and House vs. Senate as well as useful narratives from students and alumni. A print copy is available in the PILC Library and an online version can be found at

http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/CDO_Public/2012_Guide_Body_Public.pdf

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