

May 19, 2016

To whom it may concern:

My name is Michael Ortiz and I am a 2016 graduate of Drexel University's Thomas R. Kline School of Law inaugural Two-Year Accelerated JD program. I began participating in Youth Court through Education Works during my Spring 2L semester (the third semester of the accelerated program). Drexel Law has a pro bono requirement for graduation and I enjoy working with children; therefore, Youth Court was a natural fit to fulfill that requirement. What I didn't expect, was how much I would get out of my participation.

The purpose of Drexel's pro bono requirement is to instill a sense of community in the law school population. Lawyers have a unique responsibility to be the gatekeepers of justice and fairness in society. Drexel wants to ensure that we, as law students, learn early on that helping those most vulnerable is part of that responsibility. Working with the indigent population within walking distance to the law school fits perfectly with Drexel's program.

When I initially signed up for Youth Court, I was excited about the opportunity to work with children. Having been raised by a single mom, I am well aware of the challenges these kids face every day. My first session, Gregg Volz, the Youth Court Program Manager, asked me to address the class and make a "good opening statement." Having already completed my 1L year and gone through "cold call hell," this should have been a simple and straightforward task; but, as I looked out at the classroom full of wide-eyed and attentive 7th graders, I was tongue-tied. This wasn't a class of my peers; this was a class of young learners who would take what I said as fact—that was a difficult notion to get over.

Once I got into a stride, Youth Court was fulfilling like no other experience I have gone through. In every job interview I have been on, the interviewer brushes through my 10 year career in the U.S. Navy, speaks briefly about my two internships at public defender's offices, and wants to know all about Youth Courts. I am proud to exclaim that Youth Courts gave me the opportunity to grow as a public speaker, to gain confidence, and to research trial advocacy strategies and break them down to an understandable level for 7th graders—a task that will be very useful when preparing to address a jury of varied educational backgrounds.

I truly enjoy service to my country. I stayed in the Navy Reserves through law school after 7 ½ years of Active Duty. Youth Court gave me the opportunity to serve my community. To hopefully form a lasting impression on children who don't have the same chance of success that their peers living on the Main Line enjoy. I hope to use the experience I gained in Youth Court to begin a career in public interest law after (hopefully) passing the bar in July. I also hope one-day help to expand Youth Courts to every school in the United States. It is a program that works for all: the children who got in trouble, but are kept in school, and saved a suspension, through intervention by their peers; the participants who learn the rule of law, confidence, public speaking, writing skills, and the importance of a second chance; and the law students and lawyers who get the amazing opportunity to use their skills to give back to the community.

Michael A. Ortiz Jr.