

To: Pennsylvania Democratic Policy Committee
From: Rachael Eisenberg, Esq. – Project Manager, City of Philadelphia Managing Director’s Office
Re: Philadelphia Youth Courts
Date: May 2, 2016

My name is Rachael Eisenberg and I currently serve as a Project Manager with the City of Philadelphia, Managing Director’s Office of Criminal Justice. I recently graduated from Temple University Beasley School of Law, Class of 2014. During my time at Temple, I was involved in a number of extracurricular activities, internships, and clinical programs, in addition to my regular coursework. By far, one of the most valuable experiences that I had during that time was as a law student instructor in the Youth Court program at Strawberry Mansion High School.

My involvement with Youth Courts began in the summer of 2012. I joined a group of civically-engaged law student from across the city to learn about the program and develop a strategy to expand the number of youth courts operating in Philadelphia public schools. A group of several Temple students committed to launching a youth court at Strawberry Mansion High School. Although I was unable to begin as an instructor during that first year, I remained engaged with the program and arranged my schedule the following year with youth courts in mind. During the second year of the court’s operation at Strawberry Mansion, I began instructing a class twice a week, and I am so grateful for that experience.

As a law student, you spend countless hours in the classroom and library writing papers and analyzing case law. There are also internships and clinical that allow you to work with judges or at non-profits assisting with individual cases. However, Youth Courts was one of the few opportunities available that challenges law students to rethink the status quo and be creative about finding solutions to one of our community’s biggest social problems, the school-to-prison pipeline.

I cherished the opportunity afforded to me through youth courts. I was able to connect with students in my class that came from very challenging and often traumatic home environments. They taught me how to adapt and be responsive to their needs, which were often unpredictable. In motivating the students to engage with the material and appreciate the work of the court, they inspired me to fight harder and to use my education to impact change. I learned to translate my experiences in the classroom into larger policy and programming discussions about youth courts, juvenile justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

In my current profession, I regularly draw on the lessons I learned through youth courts. I am committed to finding creative ways to impact change in this city’s criminal justice system, and am constantly reminded that the work must be grounded in individual’s lived experiences. I am grateful to have been part of the Youth Courts and to have met the extraordinary young people at Strawberry Mansion. I hope that this project expands into every school in Philadelphia and that more law students carry the torch forward.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rachael Eisenberg