

Varghese Summersett Criminal Justice Scholarship Essay

Giving back to the community means more than just repaying what was generously given to us. It means repaying that, plus adding more to make our community a better place for those who were not afforded the same opportunities that we may have been afforded. It is a multiplying of generosity, a demonstration that good will can be grown from what we have been given so that we have an abundance to share with others. It is the basis of what must be done to improve ourselves, our communities, our society, and our world.

Because I was fortunate enough to escape a multi-generational cycle of domestic abuse, I feel compelled to contribute to my local community by helping to improve the lives of abused and disadvantaged children who may be caught up in our criminal justice system. Each year in December, I organize and lead an interactive holiday music program for the children at Children's Shelter, which provides emergency housing to children in crisis. This includes children who have been abused, and children whose parents may be in jail. Also, this past month, I organized and performed in a benefit concert featuring 4 musical groups to raise money for _____, which provides services, food, and shelter to homeless families with children. It means so much to me to be able to use my skills to contribute directly to some of society's most vulnerable members, and I can honestly say that I gain as much as I give when working for these children.

I give back to my community because I have been given so much. When I met with my undergraduate advisor for the final time just prior to graduating from _____, Professor _____ suggested that I apply to law school. I loved the idea, and I whole-heartedly wanted to pursue it. However, at that time, despite working through my undergraduate years, I had a mere \$5 to my name and mounting student debt. Law school was not a realistic option, but I used that \$5 to

purchase a subway ticket for an interview with I got the job. I have worked in law firms ever since, and my interest in and passion for the law has only grown. As a paralegal, I have had the honor of working closely with clients who have been injured and taken advantage of. Along the way, I have been touched by stories of remarkable individuals who have risen from the dust of life-changing injuries, abuse, kidnapping, and rape. These clients and cases have profoundly shaped my perspective on law and criminal justice. And although I have had to defer my dream of attending law school for several years, the work that I have done and the clients I have served have given me insight that I wouldn't have gained in a classroom. I am eager to couple this insight and real-world experience with the skills and knowledge I will gain throughout my upcoming three years as a law student.

Once I become an attorney, in addition to assisting regular clients, I look forward to maintaining an active *pro bono* case load which I hope to use to help ensure that all people, especially victims, have representation in our criminal justice system. By victims, I mean both those who have had violence inflicted upon them, and those who perpetuate violence. Those who have had violence inflicted upon them need help as they navigate the both court systems and social services. Legal services are essential to assist such victims' escape from the cycles of violence so that they can become empowered and successful in their families and communities. And people who commit violent acts are often victims of violence themselves, have mental illnesses, substance abuse issues, and may face challenges such as poverty, under-employment, and lack of education. Without adequate legal services, they can become, essentially, faceless monsters in a criminal justice system set up to dole-out punishments without means to help defendants to become successful in changing the course of their lives for the betterment of themselves, their families, and communities. I believe that all who have been affected by violent

crimes are worthy individuals, and that assistance should be available to those who are motivated to work toward change. I am dedicated to being a part of facilitating such change once I am admitted to the bar. The only obstacle remaining in my way as I work to become an attorney is the tuition for my education. If I am selected for the Varghese Summersett Criminal Justice Scholarship, I can assure the firm that its investment will reap dividends of hard work, high grades, and a compassionate, responsible member of the bar, dedicated to ensuring access to justice for all.