

PJI 2023 Walker Thompson Legal Fellowship

The Promise of Justice Initiative (PJI) is seeking a legal fellow for a one-year fellowship beginning Fall 2023. PJI is a New Orleans-based nonprofit that works to create positive change for people in the Louisiana criminal system. Our work is at the intersection of direct services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community engagement.

We work in the incarceration capital of the world, and primarily with people living in prisons.

We believe in a world where our legal system values each person, supports rehabilitation, and approaches justice with a lens of healing and restoration for those who are harmed. This world will be safer and more secure for all people. We focus on the inhumane conditions of confinement, prosecutorial misconduct, racial bias, excessive sentences, the impacts of Jim Crow and slavery on our criminal laws, and the abolition of the death penalty.

PJI is actively litigating the cruel and unusual punishment created by deprivation of proper medical care for all people incarcerated at Louisiana State Penitentiary (“Angola”). Angola is an 18,000-acre plantation prison larger than the island of Manhattan located on a former site of slavery and “convict leasing.” In addition to representing everyone incarcerated at Angola, we are litigating two class actions challenging Louisiana’s practice of incarcerating people beyond the lawful date those people should be released from prison. PJI’s past litigation includes a case against the extreme, inhumane heat conditions on death row at the Angola.

PJI also works actively to decarcerate and fix the prevalence of excessive and unjust sentences in our state. We do so by entering into strategic criminal representation, and through our Jim Crow Jury Project. In the case of the latter, PJI followed its victory in the US Supreme Court case *Ramos v. Louisiana* in April 2020 with a mass post-conviction relief project to represent more than one thousand people across the state who were convicted by Jim Crow juries.

PJI works closely with The Capital Appeals Project, a capital criminal defense organization representing death penalty clients across various levels of appeals. This unique structure allows direct representation to inform systemic challenges – and vice versa – and provides the flexibility to identify and pursue change where it is most needed.

Opportunity:

We are seeking a candidate with interest in exploring civil, strategic criminal litigation, and policy work. This unique fellowship gives a wide variety of experiences for a fellow to try the various ways to advocate for change in the criminal system. The fellow should expect experience conducting investigations, discovery, and working with experts, in addition to significant time visiting people in prisons. Fellowships will vary depending on the work within in the office but will involve drafting, research, oral advocacy, and client counseling. While this is a one-year fellowship, there may an option to extend for a second year.

Qualifications:

Applicants should be:

- Able to demonstrate that the applicant will have a law degree from an accredited law school obtained before June 2023;
- Able to sit for the Louisiana bar examination in Summer 2023;

- Client-centered: we serve a community of folks who are incarcerated throughout Louisiana as well as their networks and families;
- Flexible: our office is scrappy, and team members are often called upon to do unique and changing work vital to being a part of this community;
- Diligent: we strive to create work that is exceptional, whether for its speed, quality or creativity—but in the best circumstances all three;
- Anti-racist promoter of diverse voices: we are committed to being an inclusive voice that uplifts many perspectives; employees in this office should demonstrate a commitment to do the same;
- Direct and thoughtful communicators: communication is essential—as an office we believe straightforward and thoughtful communication leads to good results. Gossip and mean-spirited or passive-aggressive communication are not tolerated;
- Positive and solutions-based: when we identify problems, we also try to identify solutions—be they short or long-term. We’re constantly looking for ways to improve and not simply bemoan or commiserate.

Compensation:

Fellows are compensated \$47,500 and are offered generous benefits including, but not limited, to full health insurance benefits at no cost, short term disability, and 401K contributions after six months.

Note: PJI has voluntarily recognized a staff union, and this position is part of the union bargaining unit.

APPLICATION PROCESS: To apply, please submit a resume, cover letter, short writing sample, and three references to m Bailey@defendla.org no later than September 15th, 2022.

PJI is committed to the principle of equal employment opportunity for all employees. All employment decisions at PJI are based on business needs, job requirements and individual qualifications, without regard to race, color, religion or belief, national, social or ethnic origin, sex (including pregnancy), age, physical, mental or sensory disability, HIV Status, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, past or present military service, history of incarceration, family or parental status, or any other status protected by the laws or regulations in the locations where we operate. PJI will not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on any of these characteristics. PJI encourages applicants of all ages, and does not discriminate against formerly incarcerated individuals.