

Program links Baltimore high school students with legal careers

By: Danny Jacobs Katherine Brzozowski August 9, 2018



Rosemary Ranier, second from left, an assistant public defender, walks outside Baltimore City Circuit Court with her three interns from Law Links: Shakia McKinnon, far left, Amani Fields and Morneé Marshall-Bey. Ranier said she hopes they build empathy for those she defends, learning that 'just because someone has been arrested, doesn't mean they've done something wrong.' (Maximilian Franz)

Morneé Marshall-Key has been pushed this summer by her supervisor at the public defender's office in Baltimore to attend trials and practice better communication skills.

But Marshall-Key is not a law school student – she's a rising high school senior at ACCE Academy who hopes to one day become a lawyer.

"I don't want people to think that just because of the color of their skin that they don't have a voice," Marshall-Key said.

Marshall-Key's internship is through Law Links, a program which has placed more than 800 rising juniors and seniors in internships at law firms, courts, nonprofits, and other law related agencies across Baltimore since 1994. Law Links is run by Maryland Youth and the Law, which changed its name from the Citizen Law Related Education Program in June.

Participants work full-time, paid internships for seven weeks over the summer.

"This program isn't designed to create young people who want to become lawyers, but to open their minds to the myriad of legal professions," said Shelley Brown, executive director of MYLaw.

When selecting students, Brown says MYLaw looks for motivated students with a "C" average or better, with good or improving school attendance. Once selected, the students are fitted with a few black and white business professional outfits from Ann Taylor or Jos. A. Bank provided by MYLaw through fundraisers and donations. The clothes remove the question of what is appropriate workplace attire and a possible financial burden for the student, Brown said.

"Most kids who are working with us are coming from some sort of disadvantage or are vulnerable in some respect," Brown said. "We are sensitive to that."

While serving alongside legal professionals, students learn much more than how to make copies.



Rosemary Ranier, an assistant public defender supervising Marshall-Key and two other Law Links participants, said she hopes her students build empathy for those she defends, learning that “just because someone has been arrested, doesn’t mean they’ve done something wrong.”

Over the course of their internship, students meet every Wednesday morning at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, where they troubleshoot issues they might have at their workplaces and get the chance to hear guest speakers.

One regular guest speaker for is U.S. District Judge George L. Russell III, who also has seen firsthand how the program impacts participants.

Seven summers ago, Russell asked the students in the program if anyone hoped to become a judge. Reginald Smallwood, a rising junior, raised his hand. Russell then draped his robe over Smallwood and snapped a photo.

Smallwood later graduated from high school, earned a political science degree from Morgan State University and just wrapped up his first year at the University of Baltimore School of Law with a 4.0 GPA. He presented the photo to Russell earlier this year while interviewing for an internship with the judge. Perhaps not surprisingly, he got the job.

“If you think we do not make a difference, there is no greater proof,” Russell said.

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