2018 Upstate Institute Summer Field School Fellowship

Title: Consumer Bankruptcy Law Project Student Paralegal
Community Partner: Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc. Utica, NY Office (LASMNY)

The Legal Aid Society gives a student the chance to work as a paralegal in a long-standing partnership that helps low-income residents file bankruptcy; an ideal project for a student considering law school.

Project Description:
The Consumer Bankruptcy Law Project is a cooperative effort between the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc., Colgate University’s Upstate Institute and volunteer attorneys to increase bankruptcy representation to low-income residents of Herkimer, Madison, and Oneida counties. LASMNY staff attorneys identify non-asset Chapter 7 Bankruptcy cases for clients whose incomes are below 200% of the federal poverty level. Priority is given to those who have substantial debt due to medical expenses, loss of a job, or the financial activities of an abusive ex-spouse. After each case is developed by the project attorney and paralegal a packet which includes a copy of all relevant documents (i.e. credit reports, bills, pay stubs, etc.,) and draft schedules is sent to the attorney who has agreed to represent the client on a pro bono basis in the Bankruptcy Court of the Northern District of New York.

A Field School Fellow will be given the responsibilities of an in-house paralegal which includes: assisting the project attorney and other LASMNY staff attorneys with identifying clients whose cases are appropriate for Chapter 7 bankruptcy; organizing client files, obtaining documents and scheduling client appointments; attending attorney-client interviews and, under the supervision of the project attorney, drafting the legal forms and writing memoranda for the case files. The summer fellow will also assist the clients in completing the online required credit counseling and education courses.

About the Community Partner: The Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc. is a not-for-profit law office which provides free legal information, advice and representation to low income people in civil legal matters in a 13 county service area in central New York. The Utica, NY office is staffed by 10 attorneys and 3 paralegals.

Required Skills:
The Fellow should be highly organized, able to work well independently and have excellent communication and interpersonal skills. Fluency in Spanish or another language and an understanding of issues facing low income clients is a plus. The Fellow will interact with staff attorneys and paralegals observing legal practice in other areas of civil law.

Logistics:
This is a full-time paid research position (35 hours per week) to last approximately 10 weeks, conducted under the joint supervision of the Upstate Institute and Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc. Susan Conn, Esq. (Class of ’79) staff attorney with Legal Aid and consultant with the Upstate Institute will provide oversight of the project, which will be conducted out of the organization offices in Utica, New York. Field School Fellows receive a research stipend of $4500 plus reimbursement for any costs associated with transportation for this project. A car is not required for this project, but may be helpful.