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WE ARE NEW YORK'S LAW SCHOOL



NYLS Clinic Students Go to Congress

Adjunct Professor Joanne Doroshow • Published May 9, 2024

Left to right: Bridget Helbock '25, Madison Phillips '25, Mikayla Monaco '25, Kathryn Goodwin '25, Michelle Blaifeder '24, and Ariana Hartnell '25.

On April 19, the Congressional Consumer and Civil Justice Clinic took a trip to Washington D.C., which was the culmination of students' outstanding work this semester on a variety of important bills and issues in Congress today.

The six clinic students—Michelle Blaifeder '24, Kathryn Goodwin '25, Ariana Hartnell '25, Bridget Helbock '25, Mikayla Monaco '25, and Madison Phillips '25—advocated for legislation on which they had been working in two official meetings. They first met with Alison Cohen, Legislative Assistant for U.S. Representative Jerry Nadler, and then with Jeff Hantson and Scott Jorgenson, counsel with the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee.

Each student delivered a three-minute presentation, followed by a meaningful exchange with each staffer. The students also gave each staffer a 5–6 page legislative memo, and then distributed additional legislative packets to various other congressional offices. It was, in the students' words, an "amazing experience," said Hartnell, and "one of the highlights of my semester," added Blaifeder. Goodwin agreed that it was a "truly incredible experience," and "incredibly impactful," noted Helbock. Monaco called the trip, "the icing on the top of the cake of this clinic."

"The feel of walking into a congressman's office was extraordinary," said Phillips. The Senate meeting was in the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing room, which, Blaifeder noted, is a room "where so many important decisions regarding millions of peoples' lives have been made... I thought about powerful figures such as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg who were in that room prior to me and what they have done for our country."

The staffers commended the clinic students in emails following the meetings. Cohen said she was "thoroughly impressed with the presentations." Scott Jorgenson noted, "[The students] did a great job presenting their projects," which Jeff Hantson seconded, stating, "They were all incredibly impressive."

The experience gave students lifelong advocacy skills. Goodwin observed, "Preparing for our meetings in D.C. and presenting gave me a newfound confidence in my ability to effectively communicate." Monaco similarly noted, "What I loved most about this clinic was the ability to practice my public speaking skills." And Helbock said the clinic "has been pivotal in my law school career" with the D.C. trip "revealing the exciting and meaningful work that can be accomplished through legislative action in this country—especially with a law degree."

Hartnell summed up the trip this way: "It was great conclusion to a wonderful semester. It felt like we were working towards the D.C. trip all semester, so it was a satisfying ending and a great reward for the hard work we did."

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