

Q&A: How a Pro Bono Case Shaped the Careers of Two Summer Law Clerks at WTO

News

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As summer law clerks at Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell in 2023, [Audrey Pham](#) and [Marissa Joers](#) helped a team of WTO attorneys secure one of the largest settlements ever from the Colorado Department of Corrections in a civil rights case. Read more about the case [here](#).

We asked Audrey and Marissa to reflect on achieving this historic \$1.1 million settlement for their pro bono client.

Tell us about your experiences on this case.

Audrey: My law school friends were jealous because I had hands-on trial prep experience as a summer, which is really rare. Before we moved to mediation, we spent most of our summer preparing for trial. Marissa took the lead on drafting cross-examination outlines, and the work I enjoyed the most included drafting questions for a mock cross-examination to help our pro bono client prepare for trial. It also was really interesting to research the backgrounds of the defendants' witnesses to help with cross examination.

Marissa: It was fascinating to go through all the depositions and advise on who to call as witnesses. So much strategy went into that, including analyzing who saw what and

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debating how jurors might react to various people and details. I thought it all was fun and challenging.

How did your work on this case influence your path in law?

Marissa: My summer experience solidified that I want to be a civil trial lawyer. I previously explored criminal law and wasn't sure what direction I wanted to go heading into the summer. I also had thought about transactional law. I realized that I thrive in the chaos, pressure, and time constraints of civil litigation. One minute we were preparing for trial, and then we had to drop everything and draft the mediation statement.

Audrey: Attending the mediation was incredibly insightful. I saw first-hand what kinds of shots experienced attorneys were calling on negotiation and settlement issues, which will be invaluable for me in the future.

How was this pro bono work meaningful for you?

Marissa: What happened to our client was morally wrong and in opposition to the law. I'm proud I was able to play a part in righting the wrongs he experienced.

Audrey: It was really fulfilling to work in an environment where pro bono is such an important part of the culture. The attorneys are so passionate about giving back. I came to realize that WTO is a place where you can grow your litigation skills while also feeling like you're making a positive difference in the world.