

20th Anniversary Solidarity Series

PBF 2010 Summer Fellow Beau Haynes



Having graduated from the University of Washington School of Law, Beau completed his Peggy Browning Summer Fellowship at NELP, the National Employment Law Project, in Seattle and went on to become a co-founder of the Washington Wage Claim Project. The challenges of wage and hour abuses he encountered in the immigrant community have led to a rewarding and fulfilling career - a career in which he'd like to encourage new and upcoming law students to consider.

What in your background or experience led you to pursue a career in labor or public interest law?

“I grew up in a working class family and saw first-hand, at an early age, the value of hard work and the impact of a job on one’s life. My Dad was and still is a Teamster truck driver. In high school I started taking Spanish classes, which inspired an interest in Latin American culture and history. In college, I studied abroad in Central America and later took part in outreach visits to farm labor camps in Eastern Washington. These experiences provided an entirely new perspective on the concept of work as a necessary means to survival, and the unbalanced power dynamic that is created.”

My first job, after graduating from college, was as an Americorps wage claim advocate with CASA Latina, a local Seattle organization. There I got to know our local immigrant community, and began to learn how to combat the every day wage and hour abuses of vulnerable worker populations. That was nearly 15 years ago, and it’s been incredible to see the strides that same community has made in building awareness, knowledge and power with respect to worker rights. I’m still continually struck by how hard my clients work at their jobs. It’s always rewarding to confront the employers who have taken advantage of them and enforce wage and hour laws.”

What has been your career path since your Peggy Browning Fellowship?

“My Summer Fellowship was with the National Employment Law Project in Seattle, working on a number of policy oriented projects and amicus briefs. It provided exposure to a higher-level view of employment law issues, and put our local advocacy efforts in the national context. My fellowship also took place during the height of immigration reform efforts in 2010, so it was an exciting time. I completed the fellowship during my second summer of law school, and the experience solidified my intent to pursue an employment law career.”

After graduating from law school, I worked as an associate at a plaintiffs' law firm for a few years, handling mostly a variety of individual and class action employment cases. In 2014 I helped form the Washington Wage Claim Project, a small non-profit. My practice today is very much in line with that first position at CASA Latina, representing primarily immigrant construction and service industry workers in small to medium size wage and hour cases, with a small class action practice. We recently wrapped up a 6-week class action trial, representing Spanish-speaking janitors who worked in Fred Meyer (Kroger) stores."

Did your fellowship help you to obtain employment in labor law?

"Absolutely. One of my first activities as a Peggy Browning Fellow was to attend a fundraising event for a local non-profit, where I first met a couple of lawyers from the law firm where I would have my first job as an attorney. I asked them if they would consider hiring a third year law student part time, and they agreed. I joined the firm full time after graduation. This serendipitous connection was, of course, part of a larger networking effort. The fellowship helped plug me into the local and national community of people who do this work. And the fact the position was funded allowed me to do it; given life circumstances at the time, I would not have been able to take a non-paid position."

What advice would you give to today's students who are considering a career in labor or public interest law?

"Learn a foreign language! And market yourself appropriately if you already speak one or more languages in addition to English. Learning to speak Spanish opened countless doors for me, including many that have helped lead to my career. I simply would not be able to do my job if I did not speak Spanish. As we have broadened the scope of our practice into other immigrant communities, the need for speakers of dozens of additional languages has been highlighted. Needless to say, now perhaps more than ever our communities need immigrant advocates."

Give serious consideration to practicing wage and hour law. We are lucky in Seattle to live in a region with cutting edge wage and hour policies and advocacy efforts, but nevertheless there are not many attorneys who take on small to medium sized cases. For a variety of reasons, large class actions get most of the attention. One of the explicit goals of the Washington Wage Claim Project is to encourage young lawyers to enter the field, as there currently aren't enough to keep up with the demand. It is also incredibly rewarding work – liability is typically clear, and recovering wages for hard workers with families to support is a righteous cause that is always easy to get behind."



Beau Haynes (Left) with a client of the Washington Wage Claim Project.