



**California Senior Legal Hotline/Legal Services of Northern California**  
444 North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 312, Sacramento, CA 95811  
Telephone: (916) 551-2145 ♦ Fax: (916) 551-2197  
[www.seniorlegalhotline.org](http://www.seniorlegalhotline.org)

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR LAW STUDENTS – 2010**

### **About California's Senior Legal Hotline:**

Senior Legal Hotline (SLH) empowers older Californians (over 60) to prevent exploitation and abuse, and to maintain maximum independence, health and social productivity. Part of the network of California legal services programs for seniors, SLH provides fast, accurate, practical legal advice, limited additional assistance and preventive education to the largest possible number of seniors, enabling locally oriented agencies to devote their resources to more intensive representation, advocacy and education.

The hotline is part of Legal Services of Northern California, a larger, nonprofit agency primarily engaged in serving the poverty population of all ages with civil law issues. This puts SLH's work in the context of the legal aid community and provides access to various resources and experienced advocates. For a good client's-eye view, see [www.seniorlegalhotline.org](http://www.seniorlegalhotline.org).

### **Paid work:**

- From time to time, we may have job openings at the Senior Legal Hotline for law graduates or new attorneys. Interested students should send resumes and cover letters for our files.
- Special funding may permit paid summer internships for law students; if so, we will announce to eligible students through our mailing list.
- We are happy to cooperate with prospective interns who may be eligible for stipends through their schools or any other sources.

### **Internships:**

Interns, as well as other volunteer and new staff advocates, undergo a training and orientation program and are quickly able to start providing client service. Among other options for law students, work at the Senior Legal Hotline stands out for the breadth of topics covered, for the opportunity to interact with many different clients, for our friendly, cooperative-minded (and sometimes a little chaotic) office and especially for the opportunity to provide real, needed help to people who are unlikely to receive it anywhere else. Your chief reward will be the many expressions of appreciation and gratitude received from clients.

*Most of the attorneys and other staff hired at SLH over the past decade worked in some capacity as volunteers or interns beforehand. While it's no guarantee, of course, volunteer experience clearly gives job candidates an advantage if they have done well.*

### **Fellowships:**

A number of one- or two-year fellowships for law graduates are available for work at legal services program. Terms, requirements and deadlines vary, but typically, the agency and individual candidate need to apply together, so a high degree of advance commitment and coordination is required. We have applied successfully once, and we're happy to consider any proposal ideas.

### **The nature of work at SLH**

As "hotline" implies, most of the work is done by phone. But it's by no means just simple information and referral. A good number of the calls also involve questions that even the more experienced advocates among us need to research. This can involve library or on-line work, talking with a staff member or veteran volunteer in the office or contacting one of the experts we have at

our disposal for such instances.

We also provide additional services to a significant minority of clients whose needs are greatest and whose issues are amenable to resolution through limited intervention. This can involve a call or letter to another party, including an adversary, in an effort to obtain more information or to negotiate a resolution to a problem. Our ability to spend the time necessary for such additional service depends in part on funding and staffing, which fluctuate, and to a certain extent on a volunteer advocate's inclination, in consultation with a supervisor.

In Sacramento, LSNC has additional responsibilities to provide more extensive legal aid to seniors, including presentations to groups of seniors and, at times, representation. SLH and the main Sacramento legal aid office work together on this aspect to maximize limited resources.

Most recently, SLH has responded to the foreclosure crisis, in which seniors are frequent victims, by significantly upgrading its work in counseling affected homeowners and renters alike. In some cases, we negotiate with lenders for modifications, and occasionally we undertake litigation.

SLH also frequently assists grandparent caregivers locally with the paperwork for obtaining guardianship of their grandchildren and to some extent assistance with family and juvenile court cases as well. Someone who is interested in this issue could become highly involved.

Other current special projects within SLH include pension counseling and outreach/enrollment help for nutrition assistance (aka food stamps).

Finally, SLH has an in-house phone mediation program. Senior callers whose cases involve disputes that might be appropriate for mediation and wish to try it are referred across the office, where staff or volunteer mediators explore whether they can improve communications and seek resolution between the parties. Students with training and experience in ADR may be able to help out. Training can also be provided for those willing to make a significant time commitment.

Characteristics of a successful SLH advocate include:

- Ability to listen well and speak clearly and succinctly when gathering and giving information over the phone to a wide range of senior clients.
- Ability to work independently and follow through with assignments.
- Ability to remain calm in the face of busy phones and difficult situations or clients.
- A caring attitude toward seniors of all ability levels.
- Cultural sensitivity to lifestyles, language, and disabling conditions.
- Ability to strictly respect the confidentiality of clients.

A big advantage of working with SLH as a law student, either as a summer intern or during the school year, is that the time commitment is very manageable. We want a minimum commitment to ensure continuity (150 hours for a semester internship, 200 for a summer – and candidates willing to commit more could receive priority), but scheduling is flexible. Hours can vary from week to week, as long as we know a couple days in advance when someone will be coming in. We stay open Thursday evenings for those whose days are packed.

We are a very friendly, informal office with a small staff of attorneys, paralegals and administrative support, plus a large number of volunteers, including many retired attorneys who constitute a valuable storehouse of knowledge and experience and a variety of subjects.

SLH is located in the northwest corner of downtown Sacramento, just off Interstate 5 at Richards Blvd., with plenty of parking.

We would be happy to connect any student considering SLH internship with a previous intern for her/his take on the experience. Or contact one of us here with any questions.

David L. Mandel, supervising attorney, [dmandel@lsnc.net](mailto:dmandel@lsnc.net);

Kathleen Kelly, staff attorney, [kkelly@lsnc.net](mailto:kkelly@lsnc.net)