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Final Report – Asper Centre Fellowship with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association

This summer I worked at the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) as an Asper Centre Summer Fellow. The CCLA is an independent, national, nongovernmental organization that fights for the civil liberties, human rights and democratic freedoms of all people across Canada. Currently, the CCLA’s work is focused on five thematic areas: Criminal Justice, Fundamental Freedoms, Equality, Privacy and Education. I worked on the Criminal Justice team; however, my work was not limited to just criminal justice—wicked legal problems traverse across legal categories. Within the thematic areas, the CCLA practices five main types of advocacy: litigation, research, monitoring, civic engagement and public education. With the help of pro-bono lawyers, the CCLA regularly advocates at all levels of courts in Canada and is frequently asked to comment on legal issues in the press and broadcast media.

I had two major projects at the CCLA and worked on a variety of smaller assignments. My first major project was creating matrices to evaluate Canadian police oversight bodies based on an internally developed matrix and academic and grey literature on police oversight. I learned that in Canada, police oversight is an under-studied area and many politicians and citizens (wrongly) think they have no role to play in overseeing the police. There are three main types of police oversight bodies in Canada: (1) civilian oversight bodies (e.g., police services boards) that are responsible for setting the priorities for the police service they oversee and approving their budget; (2) police disciplinary oversight bodies (e.g., Ontario’s Office of the Independent Police Review Director) that investigate non-criminal complaints about the police officers they oversee; and (3) criminal police oversight bodies (e.g., Ontario’s Special Investigation Unit) that investigate police officers accused of some criminal conduct. I drafted a matrix to evaluate each type of police oversight body and we shared it with experts for peer review before it would be applied to evaluate Canadian police oversight bodies.

My second major project was developing a memo recommending the CCLA take a position on the decriminalization of personal drug possession writ large. Under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, it is a criminal offence to possess a controlled drug (e.g., MDMA, cocaine, heroin) without authorization (e.g., a prescription). At the start of the summer, the CCLA did not have a position on the decriminalization of personal drug possession generally but had previously taken the position that the personal possession of cannabis should be decriminalized. For my memo, I researched and summarized other government and non-governmental

organizations' positions on personal drug possession and recent and proposed changes to Canadian drug law. Before working for the CCLA, I had a keen interest in drug law and volunteered with a psychedelics charity. So, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to learn more about different models of regulating drugs (criminally and non-criminally) and different civil society organizations' positions on drug regulation.

The CCLA is a nimble and prodigious organization. I had seen their work highlighted in the media before I started the Fellowship but at the first staff meeting, I was shocked to see how small their staff was—they do a lot for their size. I enjoyed being able to attend weekly staff meetings in-person and the CCLA's collaborative culture. I had the opportunity to research and write numerous other legal memos including an analysis of the good conduct requirement for criminal record suspensions; a summary of the federal Bill C-20, which proposes a new oversight body for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Border Services Agency; and a summary of how the Canadian Police Information Centre operates.

My time at the CCLA has greatly improved my legal research, writing and advocacy skills. I feel honoured to have been able to work and learn from a leading civil rights organization. Working in the CCLA's Criminal Justice team aligned well with my interests in criminal and constitutional law. I think it will serve as a great foundation to help me launch a public law career. Returning to law school, I study easily knowing there is a dedicated team of lawyers and professionals at the CCLA working to protect our constitutional rights and advocate for progressive improvements to the law. I am deeply grateful to the Asper Centre and the CCLA for giving me this opportunity.

With thanks,

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