

McLean County Bar Association Community Service Scholarship Application

Joseph Lewis -- Loyola University Chicago - J.D. Candidate, 2020

Aspirations: I aspire to be a person who people look for when they need help. I have worked my entire career to build and maintain a reputation as a person who acts with honesty, integrity, and empathy. I enlisted in the Army in 1997, after graduating from college, because I thought it was the right thing to do. I learned many valuable lessons while serving; most importantly: it is not about me. It felt very good knowing that I was working for something greater than myself, and I enjoyed the idea of working with a team of people who believed the same thing. After the Army, I decided to continue my serving the public and go into teaching. Since 2003, I have worked at Bloomington High School teaching history and civics to the young people in our community. Further, for the first 13 years, I worked as a football coach and mentor for incoming freshman. In both roles, I gained a significant amount of satisfaction through helping others along their way to adulthood and to becoming productive citizens in our society. As a lawyer, I want to continue and enhance my role as a person who helps others. While I have not decided exactly what that role will look like yet, I am very interested in working to advance the rights of special education students as well as in working with people who cannot afford a lawyer and representing them as a public defender. I am weighing my options, and looking forward to the future.

Law School Education: I really enjoyed law school, and I feel like making the choice to attend was the best educational decision I have ever made. I will never forget the day that I discovered there was a new weekend JD program at Loyola University in Chicago. The idea that I could work at my full-time job in Bloomington and attend law school at the same time was something I had never really considered because all of the part-time programs I had seen required attending night classes; and I could not do that. My wife and I made the trip to visit Loyola, and the experience was so positive that we agreed on the drive home that our family would do whatever it took to send me there. And it was a true family effort to achieve the means necessary to go to school every other weekend, as well as to make time for all of the homework in-between. My wife, who also works full time, took on many additional responsibilities. And our three children (currently 10, 8, and 6) all helped out around the house. But it was not quite enough to make-up for my absence, and so my mother-in-law moved in with us to help shoulder the burden. I am extremely grateful to them, and every time I sit down to do law school work I take it very seriously out of respect for their sacrifices.

Future Contributions: I want to make the most of my talents by using them to help others make the most of theirs. I feel as though I am good at reading and interpreting legal documents, and I think I have an aptitude for simplifying difficult concepts and explaining them to other people. I have done these things my entire career as an educator who helps young people to find their way through high school and into adulthood, and I want to continue to do the same types of things as a lawyer. I think being a lawyer will give me access to a larger and more diverse group of potential people with whom I can work, and assist them when they need help with things I am good at. I have faith that, in the end, they will use their gifts to benefit others around them; perhaps even me. However, getting repaid is not the point. I want to use my skills as a lawyer to benefit as many people as possible, and I cannot wait to get started.