

The Mike Lee Fellowship in Criminal Justice

The Mike Lee Fellowship in Criminal Justice is presented twice each year to people who have (or have had) criminal records who aspire to a career in criminal justice or community organizing in Philadelphia and have demonstrated a commitment to community and to social equity. It provides a stipend to the recipient who will work 8-10 hours per week for six months in the offices of Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE). Mike Lee Fellows will work with clients, arrange and lead community education programs, and conduct outreach to communities whose members have been impacted by criminal record histories; and will have the opportunity to meet Mr. Lee and his colleagues in the District Attorney's and Public Defender's Offices. After their fellowship period ends, they will benefit from the legal knowledge and analysis they have acquired, and are expected to serve as resources for organizing their communities around criminal justice issues. They will also be eligible to serve on the Steering Committee for PLSE's Pardons Project.

The Mike Lee Fellowship is one of very few offered to people with criminal record histories to work in the field of criminal justice. The Fellowship is named in honor of Mike Lee, a criminal defense lawyer who was a co-founder of Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity and served as its founding Executive Director from its founding in 2010 until January 2018, when he was appointed Director of Legislation and Government Affairs for the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office.

As managing attorney for PLSE's keystone project, the Criminal Record Expungement Project, and frequent educator for the Pennsylvania Bar Institute, Mr. Lee trained hundreds of volunteer attorneys and government officials across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, organized hundreds of community education events in Philadelphia, argued thousands of expungement and redaction petitions, and worked closely with the Lieutenant Governor to create Pennsylvania's "Pathways to Pardons" program, which is regarded as a national model. In addition to providing direct legal aid, Mr. Lee advocated for criminal record history reform and a new public understanding of that criminal records do not define people. As a result of his innovative work, PLSE received the prestigious Goffman Award from the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation in 2017 and a Barra Award for 2018-19. Mr. Lee himself received a number of awards and recognitions, including the F. Sean Peretta Service Award from the Young Lawyer's Division of the Philadelphia Bar Association, the Outstanding Young Attorney from the Barristers Association of Pennsylvania, the La Justicia Award from the Hispanic Bar Association, and the Excellence Award from Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network. He was also named one of Drexel University's "40 under 40", which recognizes its "most interesting, entrepreneurial and creative young graduates."

The Mike Lee Fellowship is funded by tax-deductible contributions made to PLSE through its website or <https://www.paypal.me/plsephilly>. Nominations by a judge, community leader, or non-profit leader are strongly encouraged, but self-nominations will be accepted. Deadlines, process and decision dates will be announced on PLSE's website.

ABOUT PLSE: Founded in 2010, PLSE provides free legal representation to low income residents of Philadelphia whose criminal records are holding them back from achieving their potential as productive, contributing citizens. The services include seeking expungements in criminal court and pardons from the Governor, educating elected and community leaders, and empowering under-resourced communities to seek a greater voice and needed legislative reforms. For more information about PLSE, visit our website or contact info@plsephilly.org.

Recipient of the 2018-2019 Barra Award as an Exemplary Non-Profit

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