

**Speech by Atteeyah Hollie**  
**Sax Prize Luncheon**  
**April 19, 2010**

Thank you all for being here today. I am both shocked and humbled by this honor.

I thank the Sax family and prize committee for their continued commitment to the clinical programs that touch clients and students' lives alike.

A big thank you to my fellow students in Clean Slate and the Death Penalty Clinics. You provided the most supportive and inspiring work environments a lawyer-to-be could wish for. Your commitment and tireless drive in working for equal justice is infectious. I thank you for sharing this journey with me.

To my parents and Nate – thank you for putting up with me. You supported me and all of my career choices – namely my desire to work in prisons in the rural South, I'm sure every parents dream. Nate, I thank you for encouraging me to be me.

To the clinical staff and interns – I appreciate your support of and dedication to social justice work.

Finally, I thank my supervisors. They somehow juggle the dual tasks of standing up for the most vulnerable and marginalized populations on the one hand, and training the next generation of public interest attorneys on the other. Eliza Hersh, River Abeje, Tirien Steinbach, Jeff Selbin, Ty Alper, Kate Weisburd, and Lis Semel – you all mean more to me than you could ever know.

Though I am indeed moved by this award, I have gained so much more from my experiences in both clinics than I could ever have put in.

**East Bay Community Law Center**

At EBCLC, I got to see the criminal justice system at work in a way I had never seen before. In Georgia, where I worked prior to law school, men and women were constantly reminded of their past mistakes and convictions every time they applied for a job, housing, or school. Georgia simply did not afford people a second chance.

Though California provides a legal remedy for those seeking relief from past convictions, without counsel and advocates, the statutory promises of restoration ring hollow. EBCLC's Clean Slate clinic steps in to make real these claims of restoration for Alameda County residents. At EBCLC, I saw what happens when people permanently exit the revolving door that is our criminal justice system. I worked with people like Robert Mills, who, after decades of drug addiction, obtained a level of rehabilitation that the courts failed to provide, let alone offer. He took it upon himself to enter rehab, become gainfully employed, and move into his own home after years of homelessness. But he sought clean slate remedies for reasons largely for selfless reasons. Mr. Mills ultimately wanted to gain legal custody of his young niece and nephew,

whom he feared would go down the same route he did without a positive role model in their lives.

Appearing on his behalf in court was my first time advocating for anyone in court. I initially worried that no one would take me seriously. After all, people often mistake me for a high school student. But with Eliza and River's guidance and my clients by my side, I was quickly reminded that this was not about me. It was about our clients. It was about them finally being able to say, 'My convictions do not define who I am.' It was about them finally receiving validation for the years of work they put into restoring themselves, families, and communities. Being able to assist Mr. Mills and other clients in that effort was one of the most meaningful things I have done in law school.

### **Death Penalty Clinic**

I can honestly say the same about my time in the Death Penalty Clinic. The Clinic was one of the main reasons I wanted to come to Boalt. Little did I know that my experience would far exceed the already high expectations I had coming in.

The Clinic crystallized for me what it means to be a lawyer. The gravity of our work requires that we do more than learn and memorize legal rules. For instance, I knew coming into the clinic that discrimination in jury selection was unconstitutional. What I did not know was how to make this rule work for a client whose capital trial was tainted by discrimination. I soon found myself working on a number of unfamiliar fronts to show that our client was entitled to a hearing – and hopefully a new trial. This took me into the realm of statistics and into old case files to prove historical discrimination, while also introducing me to jury discrimination experts whose successes in their own cases could inform our work.

Yet I have also gained a greater insight into the factors that so color our clients' childhoods. Writing statements for mitigation witnesses who can help tell our client's story sobered me to the trauma inherent in our capital clients' lives, as well as the sheer humility and persistence that lawyers must maintain in unearthing and gathering these stories. These experiences, coupled with Lis' guidance, enthusiasm, and trust, have forever transformed my definition of zealous advocacy.

And so has our client. Though his experiences to date have given him little reason to believe in our legal system, he exudes a level of courage and faith that I only hope to mimic in my own life.

But my experience was not unique. There are so many amazing clinical students who dedicate their law school careers to bettering the lives of others while handling unreasonably daunting academic course loads. I am just happy to be in their company.

To conclude, I cannot stress enough my gratitude to Lis and Eliza for accompanying me on this amazing journey. You had faith in me when I did not have it in myself. I would not be up here if it weren't for you. You exemplify the passion, skills, and dedication I hope to one day approach. Thank you for leading by example.

Thank you again for this amazing honor.