

In Praise of Government Lawyers

I have had the opportunity to know and work with a long list of talented government lawyers and judges. What has always struck me is their dedication and fidelity to the public interest.

BY LARRY J. MARTIN

I grew up in a public-employee household. My mom was an elementary school teacher who devoted her entire adult life to educating the children of my hometown. For her, it wasn't a job, but a calling. She cared about every kid, especially those who struggled on the home front. She always paid particular attention to her students who faced challenges that would interfere with their ability to learn and grow.

We had family, friends, and neighbors who served our community as public employees, by picking up our trash, delivering our mail, teaching school, maintaining our parks, and plowing our streets.

When planes flew into the twin towers on Sept. 11, 2001, as hundreds of people were running out of the buildings, it was public employees – firefighters, police, and other civil servants – who rushed in.

It is public servants we turn to in crisis and troubled times. We look to them to help rescue, support, and rebuild our torn communities, ensure our civil rights are protected, and work toward a more fair and just society.

Throughout my professional career, I have had the opportunity to know and work with a long list of talented government lawyers and judges. What has always struck me is their dedication and fidelity to the public interest – to ensuring that everyone is given the protections afforded under the law, access to governmental services, and fair treatment in our legal system.

There are 2,770 individual stories in the State Bar of Wisconsin of government lawyers working toward advancing the common good. One of these stories is that of Erik Guenther. Erik is an attorney advisor for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Stationed in the Virgin Islands, Erik is helping lead efforts at

long-term hurricane recovery from hurricanes Irma and Maria, while also preparing for efforts to address future storms that impact the islands.

Erik's passion is rooted in a deep commitment to service in which he sees his job as an opportunity to have a positive impact in protecting and improving people's lives. His governmental position provides a bigger footprint in making this possible. I'd like to think that Erik's values and commitment to public service, might, at least in part, be shaped by the public educators who taught him. That would include my mom, Helen Martin, who was Erik's third-grade teacher. I know she would be proud of him.

Our government lawyers are the epitome of the defenders of the rule of law and the bulwark for a more fair and just society.

At the State Bar of Wisconsin, our Government Lawyers Division (GLD) is a powerful advocate for addressing the concerns of government-employed attorneys. Members of the GLD include state attorneys, state public defenders, state prosecutors, corporation counsel, family court commissioners, city attorneys, United States attorneys, and others. The division provides a forum for the exchange of ideas among government attorneys and aims to foster communication and cooperation between government and private-practice lawyers.

I have never understood people who do not seem to value the crucial role public employees play in promoting, protecting, maintaining, and strengthening the fabric of society. Our government lawyers are the epitome of the defenders of the rule of law and the bulwark for a more fair and just society. **WL**

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