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What Makes My Client Guilty? Discussing the Processes, Effects, and Costs of Wrongful Convictions

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Private vs. Public Attorneys

The basis of this paper will be to discuss my chosen career path following graduation. The career path that I will be exploring is that of an attorney. After I finish my athletic career, my next goal will be to enroll in law school and graduate in three years with my Juris Doctorate. My father is a partner at a law firm that handles many different cases, from malpractice allegations to criminal charges. My sister is also a public defender in Pittsburgh and represents individuals who can not afford to hire a private attorney. As a public defender you may encounter and acquire many different cases, such as criminal or wrongfully accused, to name a few. It would be easy to say that this is the family business, but that is not the reason that I would like to become a lawyer. I would like to become a lawyer to help all of the people who are falsely imprisoned or given harsher sentences than deserved and end up losing their life to the criminal justice system. In this paper, I will be discussing that research that I have compiled from my two family members, one as a public attorney and one as a private attorney. I will discuss career related topics such as the hiring process, education requirements and more. Finally, I will explore the processes of lawyers around the criminal justice system, and three policy issues that relate directly to them. I will explore issues involving overworked and underpaid public defenders, which will lead into a dissection on the mental health of lawyers. That will lead into the main focus of this paper which is wrongful convictions. As many know wrongful convictions are a huge proponent of our country's criminal justice system. So, it may be hard to understand why such miscarriages of justice are still

happening in the year 2022, in this paper I will explain my research and provide proper reasoning and suggest ways that we as a country can work to counter act wrongful convictions.

Background

For those who may not know there are many different types of attorneys in the defense field. There are family lawyers who focus primarily on custody battles, divorce lawyers who focus on divorce and compensation hearings, and also contract lawyers whose primary focus is to negotiate contracts for both businesses and workers alike. In this section, I will be speaking on the career path of attorneys both public and private, including, what they do, and their primary roles. Though they are both attorneys their daily roles are a bit different.

My sister is an assistant public defender at the Allegheny County Office of the Public Defender. Her primary roles are to represent indigent individuals who are charged with criminal defense but cannot afford to pay a private attorney. Her duties are to meet with clients prior to any and all stages of the criminal process, prepare and file pretrial motions to effectively litigate issues and devote a proprietary amount of time to maintaining current knowledge of applicable law. On the counterpart my father works as a private defense attorney and partner at Mincey, Fitzpatrick, and Ross Law Firm. His primary role is head of responsibilities at the state level (which means that he oversees all criminal defense cases that are presented to the company, and decides which cases the company should accept or deny), and leads the criminal defense practice section of the

firm. His daily duties are to meet with clients prior to any and all stages of the criminal process, and devote a proprietary amount of time to maintaining current knowledge of applicable law. The daily duties of a public or private attorney do not differentiate too much from one another. Except for their daily work environments and meetings with clients. As a private attorney most of your day outside of the courtroom will be spent in the office, being that you are private most clients or family members of clients will come to your office to meet with you. As a public defender most of your day outside of the courtroom will be spent going to jails, or prisons to meet with your clients as some will be incarcerated until court for lack of sufficient funds. I can definitely see myself going the route of the latter because of my fathers primary roles. Being the head of responsibilities as well as a partner at a firm is something that I can see myself doing one day, and the attorneys at the level are compensated better than at the public defender level.

Processes

Next I will explore the hiring process for each. As a public defender, the hiring process requires one to submit a resume and cover letter which will be followed up with an in-person interview. The first interview is basic; they ask you questions about your interest, what made you want to join the office of the public defender, and prior experience. You are also given a mini hypothetical based on Pennsylvania criminal procedures that you go through with the hiring committee. If you succeed beyond the initial interview, you are required to come back for a second and final interview in which

you are required to write an appellate brief and then required to argue that brief in front of the hiring committee. Participants are also required to do a mock preliminary hearing, and on certain occasions, a mock bond hearing as well (T. Page, personal communication, January, 2022).

As a private attorney at my father's law firm, a potential hire is required to first submit a resume, a personal statement, and a writing sample to attorney Rollie Ross who manages personnel at the firm. If qualifications are met (background check, licensed attorney, Juris Doctorate degree, and prior experience in chosen practice) an initial one on one interview is scheduled between the candidate and attorney Ross. If the initial interview is successful, a subsequent interview with the candidate and the other partners, including my father, is scheduled (S. Page Sr., personal communication, January 2022). The hiring process actually seems to be a bit more intensive at the public defenders level which is surprising but understandable because most private attorneys begin as public defenders. It seems as if the public defender's office wants to be sure that they are hiring and establishing the best young attorneys possible, not only as an attorney but also as an individual. I believe that the majority of potential candidates are handpicked amongst hundreds of applicants to work at the Mincey, Fitzpatrick, and Ross firm so it makes sense for the process to not be too intensive. Essentially if a candidate has already proven their worth enough to even be considered for the job so the interview can serve more as an eye test or in person evaluation.

The educational requirements are mostly all the same for all lawyers and attorneys. You must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited four-year college. You must have a

juris doctorate from an American Bar Association law school as well as a Pennsylvania law license. There are great lawyers from all over the world, but ranking of law school does matter but is usually not a determining factor for a lawyer getting a good job as an attorney. It may affect the pay grade. A recent graduate attorney from Yale University School of Law may have an easier path to becoming a private attorney than a recent Widener University Law School graduate, but neither will be out of work for long.

Finally, additional training to improve resume. My sister took a lot more additional training than my father did because she went to law school at an earlier age than he did. She took preliminary hearing training, motion practicum training, voir vire training (jury selection), trial college training, and continued legal education (CLEs). CLEs are a requirement for a lawyer to retain their law license, which include a variety of topics in all different areas of the law. Preliminary hearing training is teaching you how to conduct a preliminary hearing, learning what questions to ask, what procedural posture is allowed and how to interact with clients. My fathers' additional training consisted of internships while in law school, after getting a law license an attorney must complete a minimum of 12 continued learning credits to be certified each year to continue practicing law which he still continues to do. He also interned for a private law firm and completed an intensive trial advocacy program (ITAV) while in college which is an intense learning environment where you better your trial skills through mock trials, witness questioning and interrogation skills. While I knew that becoming an attorney was hard work, I did not realize how much it is a continued learning experience. This continued learning

experience is very important so that attorneys can stay involved and aware of new laws and motions that change as well as go into effect every day.

Career Advancement

Next I am going to discuss the career prospect which is where I noticed the biggest differences in these two lines of criminal defense. A public defender in Pennsylvania will start at \$50,000 as an annual salary and will have the opportunity to move up between \$10,000 and \$15,000 yearly depending on what tier they are elevated to within the company. Benefit wise, as a public defender you are allotted full benefits, dental, eye, student loan forgiveness and the opportunity to have your student loan debt wiped completely clean after 10 years of public service. You also have the ability to advance your career into different units. Each unit has its own department of criminal justice that it specializes in, The Major Felony Unit handles the biggest cases at the firm such as RICOs, and Supreme Court Indictments, they are also the highest paid at the office of the public defender. Next are the Trial Managers, these individuals handle all of the trial proceedings and cases as well as assign specific cases to each public defender so that no one is overwhelmed (T. Page, personal communication, January, 2022). They are among the second highest paid at the firm. My sister's main goal over the next few years is to get into either the major felony unit or the managerial units at her firm, both of which handle the biggest caseloads at the office. Promotions are not hard to gain at the office. The job is very case specific, so she gets a variety of different experiences by litigating so many different cases. In order to gain promotion, first she must have a certain amount of

jury trials done and have been at the firm for a certain amount of time. Then the higher ups will see how she has been assessed as an attorney and make promotion decisions. Her next goal is to be promoted to the Major Felony Unit.

As for my father, as a private attorney the salary potential starts at about six figures and up. The benefits are full, dental, eye, and partnership shares. Partnership shares are the benefits that contribute to the part of the company that he owns that is bought out by remaining partners of the company. As a partner the only opportunity for career advancement is to buy a bigger share of the company.

Both attorneys described good but stressful work environments. Due to them always being active between different courtrooms for different cases along with having to meet with potential clients at the office or at jails or prisons. Majority of their days are spent in court and the time that is not in court is spent in the office. My father also has a home office that he likes to do his work in, and my sister has an office that she shares with two other attorneys, as a public defender she can not work from home.. There is a reason that lawyers are among the highest paid in the criminal justice fields because the work that they do is so strenuous. I can only imagine the mental toll that fighting for my clients freedom for months or years and then them being found guilty and being sentenced would take on me. Knowing that I did everything in my power to gain someone their freedom back and that it still wasn't enough. It takes a strong individual to manage hundreds of those scenarios on the daily. I prefer my father's salary and benefits as opposed to my sisters as a public defender. As a private attorney and partner of a law

firm it seems that you are amongst the top 1% in your field which is definitely where I would like to be.

Overworked and Underpaid Public Defenders

Throughout the years the term public defender has gained a negative connotation, as being a lawyer who is not as efficient or as expensive as a private attorney. A public defender is an attorney that can be appointed to an individual who cannot pay for a private attorney. Public defenders are also paid by the state, because of those two factors public defenders often have very heavy and intensive workloads. Due to there being more individuals who cannot afford private representation than there are public defenders in a particular state or area. While the average individual may view a public defender as a less than qualified individual who is ill-equipped to do their job because of public misconceptions, what many do not know is that most private attorneys begin their criminal defense careers as public defenders.

Not only are most public defenders overworked but they are also usually very much underpaid as well. Schoneman (2018) explained some of the discrepancies between public and private attorneys such as pay, caseload, and average hours worked. For example, they explained how a first-year private attorney would usually make “\$135,000 and the average fifth year salary is 172,000. Public defenders, who represent those who cannot afford legal services, make on average only about \$47,500 coming out of law school and \$64,000 by their fifth year working. Now, imagine also being in over \$100,000 of debt — the amount with which the average law student graduates”

(Theodore Schoneman, 2018). With public defenders being underpaid, their intense caseloads and lack of resources only goes to further work against them. Although it can be overwhelming work with very underpaid wages many public defenders work for the pleasure they get from helping the misfortunate. People who cannot afford to pay their own bills so they are sometimes reduced to lives of crime to support themselves. People who are wrongfully accused and imprisoned simply because their families cannot afford private attorneys. Many public defenders believe in helping out and working with these types of people.

Along with that lack of resources, the job of a public defender is one that involves too many working hours with not enough time. We are able to see what a direct result of these overworked attorneys looks like in the 2017 case of Landon Quinn. Quinn a man who was facing charges of robbery and murder and subsequently sentenced to life in prison. According to The Washington Post article “How Two Overworked Public Defenders and Six Judges Left a New Orleans Man With A Life Sentence”, the interesting thing about Quinns case was that “There was no forensic evidence linking Quinn to the scene. There was no gun to tie him to the crime. Police never found his fingerprints at the scene, and there was no gunshot residue on his hands. Instead, Quinn was convicted on just a single piece of evidence. It happens to be among the least reliable forms of evidence allowed in a courtroom: cross-racial eyewitness identification.” (Radley Balko, 2019). Unfortunately throughout the trial his “had the evidence to impeach the eyewitness who was the entirety of the state's case” (Balko, 2019). Here we can see the impact of public defenders being overworked and why it is counter

productive. During his trial Quinn had two public defenders assigned to his case, one was handling 711 other cases at the time of trial and the other had 543 other cases at the time of trial (Balko, 2019). That showed to be an unambiguous reason for them losing the case and this man losing his freedom over something so simple.

Solution

In conclusion, we have seen the results of underpaid and overworked public defenders. If these attorneys are underpaid, they may not have the resources or the mental capacity to continue to be in the best interest of their clients. In regard to that I believe that a great solution would be to raise the pay of public defenders. Since they are state funded workers it should not be that hard to increase their funding, but if that were to happen you may begin to see higher win rates due to more attorneys being properly funded, as well as an increase in new attorneys who aim to being public defenders. So, that previously mentioned Yale University graduate would apply to the public defenders office and only increase the effectiveness of the office. If raising pay rates were not a feasible option for the state, I would suggest paying a percentage of the student loan debt of these public defenders for every year that they work for the state it is different that the previously mentioned solution because an attorney would have to work 10 years as a public defender. I propose after each year as a public defender the attorneys have a portion of student loans removed which would start a pipeline of new attorneys working with the public defenders office, having loans removed, and then branching off into private practice to even out ratios of public and private attorneys together.. In order to

reinforce that release of some financial burden on state funded public defenders. As for the issue with overworked public defenders, there have already been new standards put into place to counteract the intense workload with the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals recommending a maximum of 150 cases per year (Balko, 2019). This is a great potential solution, but it needs to go a step further. You can recommend that a public defender only take on 150 cases but what happens when there are more cases than public defenders to represent them? The best potential outcome would be to release some of the financial burden on public defenders by increasing salary or lifting student loan debt which would then increase the turnaround of public defenders and invite more former law students into becoming public defenders. Then you have less cases per public defender and more public defenders per state.

Mental Health of Attorneys

The next policy issue that will be getting explored is the mental health of lawyers. This is often overlooked in the criminal justice system. As previously discussed lawyers and public defenders especially are often overworked and under compensated, but not many analyze or acknowledge the toll that that takes on an individual mentally. Rosenthal (2021) explained that “21 percent of licensed, employed attorneys qualify as problem drinkers, 28 percent struggle with some level of depression and 19 percent demonstrate symptoms of anxiety” (p. 21). One may ask why so many lawyers demonstrate such poor mental health? Almost all lawyers work outside of regular business hours, are in debt from law school, or overloaded with different cases. In short, most of these lawyers are

overwhelmed. Not only are on the job stressors a key factor in lawyer mental dissatisfaction, but most of these lawyers have been struggling with mental health long before entering the courtroom, some as far back as law school. “New law school students exhibit rates of depression around 8-9 percent --but after three years in law school, 40 percent of students are depressed” (Rosenthal, p. 28, 2021). Most higher education students “go through their bouts and deal with mental health”. Things such as being away from “family, relationships, work and school life balance” as well as continuing to learn who you are as an individual are all factors that weigh on the mental health of higher education students (T. Page, personal communication, 2022). It should not be a surprise that a percentage of law school students experience burnout and depression, but 40% is insanelly too high. Strategies need to be implemented into the daily lives of law students to improve mental health. I would suggest on campus counselors to help these young adults manage their daily lives and mental health. I would also recommend less daily readings. I can recall when my sister was in law school, and she was always very anxious because she felt she never had enough time for anything due to her heavy course load. On average she would have about 40 pages of reading for one class while having a full schedule of five classes. Balancing that type of heavy course load while also working part time could easily result in individuals experiencing burn out.

Lawyers are one of the highest paid professions in the criminal justice system but are also one of the “top five professions for highest suicide rate” (Rosenthal, 2021). That statistic alone is unacceptable. Higher (2018) states “33 percent of Florida lawyers reported high stress as a major problem; 32 percent reported that balancing work and

family was a significant challenge; and 7 out of 10 said they would change careers if they could. The alcoholism rate for lawyers is double that of the general population; 33 percent suffer from diagnosed mental disorders; attorneys are also 3.6 times more likely from depression” (p.4). Although those numbers are very alarming, they paint a vivid picture of what it is like being a lawyer from a mental health standpoint. I have experienced these issues firsthand with my father who is a lawyer. He has told me before that at times early on in his career or while he was in law school balancing three kids and striving to do well in your career, there were times when he felt that he would succumb to the pressure. He had to make many sacrifices to get to the level that he is as a private attorney. Having to miss family events like, sporting events, dance recitals, or birthdays has taken a toll on him, but he continues to be a pillar of strength and a great lawyer. Given these struggles, 7 out of 10 lawyers said “given the opportunity would change careers if they could” (Higher, 2018).

Wanting to change careers and being unhappy with work and life balance can lead to some unhealthy habits such as alcoholism or drug abuse. The rate of alcoholism amongst lawyers is “twice” that of the general population (Higher, 2018). After meeting fellow attorneys through networking with my father and sister, I was able to notice that majority of the lawyers that I know personally like to unwind by having a drink or two, but what happens when drinking becomes an unhealthy habit? Krill (2018) found that “between 21 and 36 percent of currently practicing attorneys qualify as problem drinkers” (p. 11). Many of these lawyers are overindulging in alcohol as a coping mechanism for their work stressors. Not only is this bad for the mental health of attorneys but long-term

alcohol addiction begins to cause issues to their cognitive health. Lawyers are generally very intelligent people, and their job and their clients' freedom depend on their ability to think clearly in high stress settings, adapt, and to be able to compete under high pressure situations. Some of the cognitive abilities that lawyers must master are problem solving, vivid memory and decision making, all of which are impaired and interrupted after too much alcohol consumption over time. If they cannot do these things at a high-level they may begin to lack in work performance or lose clients which would be a further detriment to their mental health. Krill (2018) explained that "many problem-drinking attorneys can perform at a reasonably high level for many years, at least outwardly. But if you peel back the curtain a bit, you'll see that they're not performing at nearly the level they could be in the absence of their alcohol habit" (p.12).

Solution

Lawyers need to gain new coping mechanisms to help them deal with life and everyday stressors as a legal professional. Some of my recommendations would be to first seek professional health for your mental health. Lawyers could go to see a therapist individually or firms could hire one to be a part of the staff. With all of the mental exertions that lawyers experience on a daily basis, it would be beneficial to have someone at the office whose job was only to calm these professionals and help them regulate their stress and improve overall well-being, this is not a common practice amongst any of the firms that I know of. Many firms have relaxation rooms where individuals can decompress alone but not complete mental health specialists on site which is why I think

that it would be a great component to improve mental health. The next step would be to improve work and life balance. I would institute more working from home. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen more jobs switch to remote, although the job of a lawyer is one that cannot be completely remote due to courtroom duties, while not at the courtroom, lawyers could work from home which would allow them to spend more time amongst family and loved ones. This would not only promote better family relationships but can improve mental health of these legal professionals. I would also recommend practicing mindfulness. As previously mentioned, lawyers have to be very advanced cognitively. One disadvantage to this is that oftentimes they never stop thinking or overthinking, which could also lead to stress and burnout. As an individual with two lawyers in my family, I have seen first-hand how practicing mindfulness can promote better cognitive health. Yoga and reading books that teach you how to live in the current moment have worked wonders for my family members, so it is something that I recommend. For the attorneys who struggle with alcohol addiction, I would suggest rehabilitation centers or group meetings with other people who have struggled with their own addictions. Those are just a few ways that lawyers can work to promote their mental health.

Wrongful Convictions

The final issue with our country's criminal justice system that I will be dissecting is that of wrongful convictions. Eight years ago, my older brother was wrongfully convicted of a murder that he did not commit. He was ultimately sentenced to life in

prison without the possibility of parole and forced to fight extremely hard to regain his freedom. Fortunately for my brother and my family he was exonerated of all charges and allowed to return to society in March of 2021. In the final part of my research I will be exploring and further examining the process of wrongful convictions, including interrogations and court hearings, while also analyzing the processes that lawyers take to have their clients' cases reopened and inspected by a grand jury. I will also discuss how lawyers can help prevent wrongful convictions and help wrongfully convicted individuals get released from prison, exonerated on all charges and compensated for their years lost.

Wrongful convictions are an extremely delicate matter, and an intense miscarriage of justice that must be improved upon. As we dive deeper into why wrongful convictions occur, I will break down each layer of the justice system that goes into wrongfully convicting an innocent individual, starting with the interrogation process which in most criminal cases is the part that makes or breaks the case. People often succumb to the pressure of being interrogated and either tell the truth or tell the interrogator what they think they want to hear. A good interrogator does a great job of easing into the interrogation and adding more pressure as it progresses, often for hours at a time, but what happens when the interrogation becomes too much? “We know that if you trap somebody in there (an interrogation room), and persuade them enough, they'll tell you what they think you want to hear, whether it's true or not, and that's the real risk” (Wendy Gillis, 2015). The fact of the matter is that most normal individuals do not have the mental toughness to withstand a real interrogation. If the police keep pressuring an individual for hours on end in an interrogation room eventually the person will say what

they think the interrogator wants to hear in order to leave wither it was true or false. That goes to show how easy it is for police to get a false statement from a perceived witness which could very well lead to a false conviction. The interrogation tactics that officers use can sometimes cross the line of ethics in order for them to get the conviction rates that they are looking for in order to close their cases.

Along with being too aggressive during interrogations other officers have also used less than ethical tactics like blatantly lying, falsifying reports, framing or leaving out evidence that could potentially clear a suspect. All of the tactics just named were used in a 1991 case in Philadelphia where a man was wrongfully convicted of a rape and murder he did not commit (Jackman, 2021). While being interrogated the wrongfully convicted man was reportedly “handcuffed in a small room for hours, threatened with having his eyes pulled out” and after being interrogated and exhausted by the officers for so long he was “handed a confession to sign so he "could go home” (Jackman, 2021). This is unacceptable and it happens far more often than actually reported. In this case in particular, you have a deceased victim and an innocent person wrongfully convicted, who exactly was justice served too? A study by the National registry of Exonerations found that “of 2,400 exonerations since 1989, 54 percent of the defendants were victimized by official misconduct, with police involved in 35 percent of cases and prosecutors in 30 percent of the cases. But the study found that in only 4 percent of cases involving prosecutorial misconduct were prosecutors disciplined, and police officers were disciplined in 19 percent of cases” (p. 40, 2020). These reports are actually surprising because more than 30 percent of both officers and prosecutors in wrongful convictions

were found to act unethical but less than 20 percent of either were actually disciplined or charged. Until police officers are held liable for unethical interrogations, we will continue to see the same cycle of wrongful conviction in our country's criminal justice system.

As an attorney, if your client is wrongfully convicted the next step would be to appeal the case. Although it may sound simple, convincing the court to reopen a case is no easy task. Once your client decides that they want to appeal their case you must look through all of the evidence, old case files, and court documents. You keep looking until you find something that was inadmissible. There are a few loopholes that defense attorneys may try to get around to get their clients' cases reopened. Hamer (2014) explains that “A common ground of appeal is that inadmissible evidence was admitted at trial. With the removal of this evidence, it may appear that guilt can not be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. But this does not mean that innocence has been proven” (p.273). In my brother's case, there was a list of evidence pointing to his innocence. Possley (2021) wrote about my brother's case, and stated “Harris's defense attorney, Brian McMonagle, requested a mistrial because records for Harris's two cell phones had not been disclosed by the prosecution. The trial prosecutor agreed that a mistrial should be granted, but the trial judge declined” (p. 1). After discovering the inadmissible evidence, the job still is not finished as a defense attorney. Attorneys then need to file a petition under the post-conviction relief act (PCRA) alleging the client's due process rights were violated by using the inadmissible evidence which would result in a new trial that would likely take months or years to process in court. If the conviction is overturned the government and the prosecutor would decide if they want to retry the individual or not, but usually after

inadmissible evidence is proven to have been used, the case and conviction are both dismissed.

After an individual has been proven innocent and released from prison they are now considered “exonerated.” Though that is not the end of the fight, for many victims of wrongful convictions there is much trauma that must be processed physically, mentally and emotionally. As an attorney with a newly exonerated client, the next step would be to sue the state. According to The National Registry of Exonerations, “a minimum of \$50,000 is owed to an exonerated individual for each year that they were incarcerated” (Possley, 2021). Most individuals would rather sue the state than get the state compensated money for their time served because they would be able to earn more money if they won in court.

One of the main factors that brings all of these risk-factors for wrongful convictions together is race, which is a core theme in wrongful convictions and exonerations. Racial disparity among police officers and their communities as well as racial disparities amongst attorneys both public and private, defense and prosecution can lead to innocent individuals being wrongfully convicted. Those same instances of blatant racism appear after exoneration. Even after individuals are proven innocent and shown to have done no wrong doing, they are still treated unfairly. Rafail and Mahoney (2019) state that “blacks wait 3.32 years longer than average to be exonerated, due to the persistent inequalities in policing, the courts, and sentencing faced by racial minorities, and particularly African Americans” (p.542). There is usually no bias in compensation because most of it is handled between a hired attorney and the court system.

Solution

In conclusion we have an in-depth understanding of the process that goes into wrongful convictions, and I will now discuss reforms to reduce wrongful convictions. In order to ensure that these officers are following ethical guidelines, during all interrogations that exceed 6 hours there should be a senior officer or higher up overseeing the interrogation from outside the room, as officers may grow to become aggressive towards their suspects, as well as having legal representation whether public defender or private attorney present to make sure that an individual is not being coerced into a confession. Along with those measures, I would also suggest trying these officers and public defenders in court for the crimes. A wrongful conviction is an egregious act that does not seem to be taken seriously based on the numbers of prosecutors and police officers who receive disciplinary action for the parts in these convictions.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the differences between public and private attorneys, along with exploring the differences in their compensation, practices, clients they represented as well as the processes they experience to get hired. I then outlined three policy issues as well as the critiques that I have for them. The first issue was overworked and underpaid criminal defense attorneys, the second was the mental health of lawyers and attorneys, and the third was wrongful convictions. All of these different issues are interconnected. Being overworked and underpaid as a public defender can negatively affect your mental

health, having poor mental health as an attorney will cause you to miss things in case files and court proceedings, one small mistake or missing a small piece of information in court could cause an innocent client to go to prison and an individual to lose their freedom.

This was a great experience and opportunity to gain insight of what my next stage in life may look like if I chose to go the route of an attorney. I feel more informed now that I understand what the hiring process entails, I also understand that although being an attorney is a job of a very intellectual individual the learning never stops as you will have to continue courses to stay up to date on newly changing laws. I also know what to look for in signs of deteriorating mental health, such as burnout, stress and substance abuse and addiction. The main focus of the paper has also developed my thinking in the department of wrongful convictions. I understand how, why, and where they can happen which will further my knowledge and practice of keeping my future clients from being wrongfully convicted.

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