



## Policy Careers an Option for Law School Grads

Attorneys often do policy work at think tanks, lobbying firms and government legislatures.

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When Lauren Hersh attended Brooklyn Law School, she had no plans for a policy career. Her subsequent experience as a prosecutor representing victims of sex traffickers, however, revealed her interest in reforming federal and state laws on sexual violence.

Hersh is now the national director of World Without Exploitation, a nonprofit that lobbies for changes in state and federal criminal laws to reduce human trafficking.

"I honestly believe that my legal background is essential to the policy work that I do," she says. "I think there's such an overlap between law and policy, and I think it is really beneficial to be able to actually read a law and understand the wording and understand the intent and understand the legislative history and understand all the components."

As Hersh's career suggests graduating from law school doesn't necessarily lead to working as a litigator, judge or corporate lawyer.

Some attorneys pursue policy careers, where they apply the legal analysis skills they learned in law school to advocate for political causes, draft bills for legislators, craft regulations for government agencies or provide policy commentaries for think tanks, nonprofits and for-profit consulting groups. Occasionally attorneys with an interest in policy become professional lobbyists for trade associations or large corporations.

Although it is not mandatory to graduate from law school in order to work at a policy organization, experts say law school graduates have a key advantage when competing for policy positions – their ability to interpret complex legal language and predict how laws might change over time. Another advantage that lawyers have in the policy world, experts say, is their ability to discern when a subtle change in a law or regulation could have significant repercussions for the public.

However, experts say prospective law students with an interest in policy should know that breaking into the policy world is difficult, because there is a significant amount of competition for most policy jobs, especially positions at think tanks.

"Think tanks such as Brookings, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Cato Institute, and policy shops typically only hire individuals with considerable, quality experience," says Richard Hermann, author of a collection of booklets that describe legal careers.

In addition, experts say, discovering entry-level policy job opportunities after law school is generally more difficult than finding a more traditional legal job.

"Most policy organizations do not have organized recruitment programs, meaning there is no linear pipeline to entry-level jobs on the Hill or in nonprofit advocacy groups," Barbara Moulton, assistant dean with the Office of Public Interest and Community Service at Georgetown University's law school, said in an email. "In that sense, it is not easy to obtain policy jobs, but students who make sure to gain the necessary field experience and develop contacts while in law school are often able to open doors for themselves and are highly competitive when positions become available."

Experts say one of the keys to success finding a policy job as a lawyer is knowing where to look for this kind of work.

"Policy jobs can be found in all levels of government as well as in nonprofit advocacy groups, think tanks, and trade associations," Moulton says. "Congress is a major source of legal internships and law-related positions for law students in DC, as are nonprofit organizations that engage in educating the public and policymakers on social and political issues."

Experts say one downside of pursuing a policy career for a nonprofit employer is that workers in this field typically receive a modest salary.

By contrast, experts say, a policy career as a lobbyist for a private sector employer can frequently lead to a six-figure salary.

Experts say the federal government's public service loan forgiveness program, which allows attorneys to have their law school loans forgiven after 10 years spent working for government or nonprofit organizations, can make these policy jobs more financially viable.

Nevertheless, experts say that nonprofit policy attorneys sometimes struggle to support families and leave their jobs for financial reasons.

"It's sad because I think a lot of them want to keep doing this work, but they have families to support so it's difficult," says Paul Goodman, senior legal counsel for the nonprofit Greenlining Institute, which advocates for racial minorities and low-income communities.

But Goodman says that although nonprofit policy work is less lucrative than most legal careers, it does allow lawyers to work collaboratively with others towards a common goal, as opposed to engaging in adversarial litigation.

Another advantage, he says, is it allows attorneys to fix flaws in laws. "In policy you get to go, 'That's not a just result. Here's what we've got to do to change that.'"

