

# Worthy Women's Scholarship Finalist Essay

Essay by Stephanie Larkin

My lifelong dream has always been to become a lawyer. Without wasting too much time on background information, I was exposed to the legal system quite early on in life. An ongoing crime was committed against me when I was a child between the ages of four and six and I had to testify all alone in a cold, stark courtroom. I then experienced the legal ramifications of my parents' divorce several years later. As a teenager, I watched helplessly as my closest friend went through deportation proceedings. In some way, I have often felt helpless and voiceless and I knew that if I could become a lawyer, I could help people like myself someday. I could help them to not feel alone, to know that they matter individually and are so much more than just a file, a burden, or a case number.

Recently, I never thought it would be possible for me to ever attend law school. I have grown up believing that hard work and determination would help me achieve anything I put my mind to and, in large part, this has proven true for me my entire life. Attending law school was the significant exception to that belief because no matter how hard I worked, I just could not see a logistical path forward toward my goal; I simply could not relocate over 100 miles away to the nearest law school. I have a teenage son and I always promised myself that I would never move him during his high school years as I had to do when I was his age. Moreover, as a single mother, there was no way I could feasibly afford to quit my job and move out of state to attend three years of in-person law school with no income during a time of such economic hardship and uncertainty. I had also often thought that at 37 I was "too old," or it was "too late" to pursue this dream. Imagine my shock and overwhelming gratitude when I heard that there were now online hybrid law school programs, programs approved by the American Bar Association ("ABA") which allowed students to continue to maintain their existing jobs while simultaneously earning a law degree. I finally felt like my lifelong dream, one that I had begun to think was just out of my reach, could now actually become a reality.

Thus far, the closest I have been able to get to becoming a lawyer is being a paralegal. I have been working at the District Attorney's Office in Reno, Nevada, for nearly 11 years since February of 2013. I was initially hired as a Legal Secretary in the Criminal Division, then promoted to the position of Legal Secretary Supervisor over the Child Protective Services Division in 2019, and then promoted to Paralegal in the Civil Division in 2021. During this time, I completed my ABA-approved paralegal associate's degree in 2014 and obtained my certified paralegal ("CP") designation through the National Association of Legal Assistants ("NALA") shortly after graduation that same year. While at community college, I volunteered at a local non-profit legal services office to assist indigent clients with filling out self-help legal forms while also serving as Secretary for my local paralegal organization, the Sierra Nevada Association of Paralegals ("SNAP"). I subsequently obtained my advanced certified paralegal ("ACP") designation in the specialty area of Family Law: Child Custody, Support, and Visitation in 2015 and then again in the specialty area of Trial Practice in 2019. After taking a year and a half break from school to address some medical issues, I went back to school in November of 2016 to pursue my bachelor's degree because I knew it was the necessary next step in becoming a lawyer. I graduated from West Texas A&M's online program with my bachelor's degree in Public Administration in December of 2021. While attending school full-time, I continued to work full time and teach fitness classes at nearby gyms over lunch breaks and on weekends to help pay for my education.

I have taken the Law School Admission Test ("LSAT") three times and have just finished submitting my application packets to nine online ABA-approved law school programs for the 2024-2025 academic year. I am awaiting decisions from these schools and am praying that my highest LSAT score, 4.0 undergraduate grade point average ("GPA"), and well-thought-out admissions essays have made me a good candidate for acceptance. Moreover, I am filled with gratitude at the mere ability to apply for law school. The time now just feels right; I have worked to rebuild my life after many challenges and want to provide opportunities for my son that I never had. I am at a place now where I have invaluable life

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experience and want to combine that experience with my lifelong passion. I truly hope that I can serve as an example to others in the future that it is never too late to pursue your dream. I would be truly honored if you would consider me for your scholarship award. Thank you for your time and consideration, and thank you for offering this scholarship opportunity to all of us.