
A Reflection on Ormoc City Jail Visit

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On August 6, 2024, the Juris Doctor (JD) students from SPSPS, under the guidance of Attorney Kenneth Fabila, executed a visit to a correctional facility. This visit aimed to immerse the students in the experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) and to understand the conditions within the facility. The excursion served as an academic exercise and a valuable opportunity for the students to observe, listen, and reflect on the legal and human realities incarcerated individuals face.

Immersion into the Life of the PDLs

The primary objective of the visit was to provide the students with a firsthand experience of the challenges faced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs). Upon entering the facility, we were immediately struck by the significant contrast between our expectations and our observed reality. For many participants, it was the first occasion witnessing the environment that PDLs endure daily, and it imparted a lasting impact.

Listening to the narratives of the individuals was one of the most enlightening experiences during the visit. Several participants recounted their challenges in navigating the legal system, with some expressing frustration regarding delayed trials and the lack of accessibility to legal representation. These accounts underscored the systemic issues present within the justice system, which frequently lead to prolonged incarceration, even for those merely awaiting trial. As a Juris Doctor student, absorbing these narratives emphasized the vital role that attorneys fulfill in advocating for the rights of the accused and ensuring that justice is neither delayed nor denied.



Ormoc City: SPSPS law students and supervising lawyer pose with detention facility personnel during their jail visitation under the Clinical Legal Education Program.

Legal and Ethical Reflections

The visit elicited numerous reflections on the legal profession and attorneys' ethical duties. A primary takeaway was the recognition that the law, although intended to uphold justice, frequently fails to implement it, especially for marginalized individuals. Many of the persons deprived of liberty with whom we conversed originated from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and could not procure competent legal representation. Consequently, they encountered substantial obstacles in defending themselves in court or securing their release.

This experience underscored the significance of legal aid and pro bono work in remedying the disparities within the justice system. It also reminded us, as aspiring legal professionals, that our responsibilities extend beyond the confines of courtrooms and administrative tasks. We are tasked with advocating for individuals unable to secure legal representation and combat the systematic delays and inefficiencies that frequently result in prolonged detention of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs).

Emotional and Human Impact

Beyond the legal issues, the jail visit also had a profound emotional impact on us students. Many PDLs shared personal stories of regret, loss, and hope. Hearing these stories made it clear that PDLs are not just case numbers or legal issues to resolve; they are human beings with families, emotions, and dreams. This realization added a human dimension to the study of law that is often absent from textbooks and lectures.

The visit challenged many of us' preconceived notions about criminal justice. It made us question the effectiveness of incarceration as a tool for rehabilitation and highlighted the importance of empathy and understanding legal practice. While the law often focuses on punitive measures, the visit reminded us that justice should also be restorative, focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration into society.



Ormoc City: A person deprived of liberty (PDL) receives a token from SPSPS law students during their Clinical Legal Education Program visit, highlighting the human side of detention and the importance of dignity, empathy, and engagement in legal advocacy.

Lessons and Takeaways

The jail visit provided us with invaluable insights into the realities of incarceration and the complexities of the justice system. It reinforced the importance of compassion in our future legal careers and our understanding of justice. The experience taught us that while laws and regulations are essential, the human aspect of law should always be noticed.

Moreover, the visit emphasized the importance of legal reforms that address the needs of society's most vulnerable. It is not enough to merely study the law; we must also advocate for changes that ensure the law serves everyone equally, regardless of their socio-economic status.

Conclusion

The jail visit on August 6, 2024, proved to be a transformative experience for us, the JD students. It granted us a profound understanding of the challenges encountered by persons detained in custody (PDLs) and the deficiencies within the justice system that frequently exacerbate these challenges. As aspiring legal professionals, the visit underscored the significance of empathy, advocacy, and the necessity for systemic reforms to ensure that justice is genuinely accessible to all individuals. We left the facility not only with an enhanced appreciation for the legal profession but also with a revitalized sense of purpose and responsibility in our impending roles as lawyers.



***Ormoc City:** Atty. Kenneth Fabila briefs the law students on proper conduct and key observations inside the detention facility, emphasizing legal protocols, detainee rights, and the ethical responsibilities of future practitioners during their field visit.*