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– Kris Phipps

Kris Phipps: Able to Relate

All it took was a simple phone call.

It was just a few years ago, and Kris Phipps was serving as policy director for State Representative Joanna McClinton in West Philadelphia. A man, recently released from jail, knocked on the office door, looking desperately for help finding his stolen car. So Kris made the call to a local towing company.

"They have the car," he told the man. The man began to cry.

"I could relate," Kris remembered recently.

It's hard to imagine, really. He's a double-major Temple grad, second-year Boston College Law student, a 26-year-old Rappaport Fellow and future lawyer from New Hampshire, a far cry from West Philly. But yes, Kris Phipps could relate.

The memory of his parents falling victim to the subprime crisis is clear still today. He had been told since he was a boy that nothing was given, that he needed to work for what he had – and so he did. And even on that day, as he helped a stranger track down his car, he knew he wasn't too far from desperation himself.

"Just from my own experience, I knew just how close I was to my whole world kind of falling apart," he said. "I was just eking by. I knew I had a support system, but that the people I was helping didn't have the same privilege that I have. So being able to relate was critical for me."

The empathy is what fueled Kris to work sometimes 70 hours a week between two jobs, even through struggles with mental health, for the three years while Rep. McClinton's policy director. It's what fueled his bid for law school and three times taking the LSATs, and his fixation on the notion that "when I'm in school, I'm going to go for anything and everything I can get."

Primary on that list of things to get was the Rappaport Fellowship, with its intersection of law and public policy – "exactly why I wanted to go to law school," he said.

His summer placement was with the Massachusetts Inspector General's office and its mission of detecting and preventing fraud, waste and abuse of public money. Kris helped monitor COVID spending, participated in a whistleblower investigation, and worked on a briefing memo regarding office procedures and investigations.

And although he is not sure what his future holds, his experience was interesting enough that his proposal to write about comparing federal and state Inspectors General earned Kris one of three Rappaport research grants.

As to a career path, Kris wants to develop his legal skills in a private firm, but ultimately knows he will return to helping those to whom he can relate: "I've never really wavered from the idea of using my opportunities, my skills and the things that have been afforded to me in my life to come back and help people in need."



– Dave Cummings
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