

## PBF Solidarity Series

### *PBF 2000 Summer Fellow Michael L. Artz*



Michael is a graduate of the American University Washington College of Law (cum laude) and is an Associate General Counsel at the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). In addition to his role as secretary of PBF's governing Board of Directors, Michael serves on the Conference Planning Committee and is a workshop facilitator for the annual National Law Students Workers' Rights Conference.

#### ***What has been your career path since your Peggy Browning Fellowship?***

*"Thanks in large part to the Peggy Browning Fund, my career is focused on serving the legal needs of working people and their unions. I served as a Peggy Browning Fellow for the National Labor Relations Board Division of Judges in the summer immediately following my first year of law school. Next, I worked as a summer associate at the union-side labor law firm Bredhoff and Kaiser, and also externed during the school year at AFSCME. Upon graduation I served as a law clerk for a judge in Washington, DC's Superior Court, as a legal fellow for SEIU, as an associate in the union-side labor law firm of Mooney Green, and, for the past fourteen years, as an Associate General Counsel for AFSCME in the union's legal department.*

*At AFSCME I have had the honor and privilege of representing public sector employees and their unions throughout the continental United States and Puerto Rico. I served as lead in-house counsel representing the City of Detroit workers during the Detroit bankruptcy and represent Puerto Rico public service workers currently as they face a bankruptcy on the island. I have drafted worker protection laws, supported organizing campaigns, and protected the health care of essential workers during the pandemic. During those years, I also have taught legal writing as a professor at the American University Washington College of Law.*

*I was so enthusiastic about my Peggy Browning experience that I quickly agreed to an invitation to serve on its Advisory Board and later its Governing Board, serving presently as a board member and recording secretary."*

#### ***Did your Peggy Browning Fellowship affect your course of study in law school?***

*"My Peggy Browning Fellowship eliminated any doubts I may have had about my ability and desire to practice workers' rights law, and it allowed me to pursue this career path because I was also, thanks to the PBF, being paid to do so. The experience further encouraged and energized me to take more labor and employment classes, to lead a labor and employment law society at the law school, and to continue to pursue a career in labor law. It allowed me to explore the government agency side of labor law and reinforced the importance of strong statutory analytical skills and persuasive legal writing skills.*

*Working at the NLRB also provided me a hands-on understanding of how the National Labor Relations Act, when properly applied and enforced, can protect the free association and collective bargaining rights of workers.”*

***Did your fellowship help you to obtain employment in labor law?***

*“Every prospective employer I’ve interviewed with since my PB Fellowship has asked about it with great interest. In addition to giving me valuable experience for my resume, the PBF’s National Law Students Workers’ Rights Conference and other events allowed me to meet other fellows and practitioners, growing a network of people that have helped to connect me to employment and other opportunities over the years.”*



***Have the interests or goals of today’s law students changed from your years in school?***

*“The interests and goals of today’s law students to use the law to not just make a living, but also to make better the lives of others and our society, have not changed. However, the urgency of the problems they and those they serve face on a daily basis has increased exponentially. Over the past fifteen years, student loan debt has increased 500% while salaries in real dollar amounts have been steadily decreasing. More and more legal internships are unpaid. Legislative attacks on unions and working people have been multiplying in number and intensity. Income inequality has been worsening every year. Students are increasingly relying on programs like the Peggy Browning Fund to allow them to follow their career passions without having to worry quite as much about their own economic needs.”*

***As a member of the PBF Board of Directors, you add a unique perspective on how PBF helps law students to see that they could have fulfilling careers in labor law. How has your perspective developed over the years?***

*“Every year the Board of Directors is faced with the pleasurable task of reviewing new employers who wish to take on Peggy Browning Fellows, and every year more and more students apply for fellowships. Participating as a board member over the years has shown me that advocating on behalf of working people continues to be a viable and rewarding career path for new and not-so-new lawyers. The legal profession generally has a bad reputation for work-life misery, but all the Peggy Browning fellows and alumni I’ve been privileged to meet truly enjoy their work and their clients.”*

***Are you connected to other PBF Alumni? Are you active in the DC Area Alumni Association Chapter?***

*“We hire Peggy Browning Fellows every summer at AFSCME, so every year I’m meeting new, talented law students who will soon be alumni. Every year I participate in planning PBF’s National Law Students Workers’ Rights Conference where I meet new students and alumni presenters. I am active in the DC Area Alumni Association Chapter and encourage alumni in other cities to get active in their associations or start one up as they are phenomenal networking tools.”*

***What advice would you give to today’s students who are considering a career in labor or public interest law?***

*“Do it! You can demonstrably improve people’s lives, help build and sustain movements, achieve a sane work-life balance, and make a decent living . . . simultaneously! Take advantage of programs like the Peggy Browning Fund that will provide economic and networking support in your endeavors. Seek out and take advantage of law school loan forgiveness programs for public interest work.*

*Network harder than you’ve ever networked before. Seek out professors and practitioners in your field of interest, and talk to them. Seek out volunteer opportunities in your field of interest. Go to all the brown bag lunches and introduce yourself to the speakers. Pursue a variety of summer jobs and externships that widen your network and experiences. Filter out the peer and economic pressure to pursue a career that does not match your passion. It can be done!”*