Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about public policy work and gun violence prevention with Allison Anderman, the managing attorney at the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, and the career related website, CareerDicta. Alison also runs The Girl's Guide to Law School.

If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com, and we'd love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today I'm excited to have Allison Anderman joining us on the podcast today. Allison is the managing attorney at the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. She is also a friend of mine from law school, and was actually a TA for one of my 1L classes. Was it civ pro? I think it was, right?

Allison Anderman: Yes, it was.

Lee Burgess: It was, yes. I mean, you were a great TA. I still don't like civ pro, but that's not your fault.

Allison Anderman: Thank you.

Lee Burgess: You're welcome. I'm so glad to have you here today. To get things kicked off, could you share a bit about your career path that has led you to the role you have today? Because I know public interest work has always been a passion of yours, even when we were back in law school.

Allison Anderman: Yeah, that's right. I went to law school because I wanted to do public interest law. I did not go in thinking, "I want to be a lawyer and I'll see what happens." I knew that I wanted to do some sort of social justice work, and interestingly enough, when I was in law school, I got very interested in employment law and litigation, and it was very appealing, and it sounded very sexy, and like what real lawyers did.

I kind of put my ... and I think that employment discrimination litigation, plaintiff side, is a type of social justice work, but ... So, after law school ... Well, actually, while I was in law school, I started interning for a solo practitioner who did plaintiff side employment discrimination litigation, and he offered me a job, and for a year after law school, I worked for him. But it turned out that the allure of litigation did not live up to the real life experience, and it was ... I mean, I worked for a solo practitioner, so that came with its own challenges.

But I think that another thing that I was very clear about when I was in law school was that I wanted work life balance, and I met my husband when I was in law school, and I knew that I did not want the life of a big firm associate, independent of the fact that I didn't want to do the work of a big firm associate because I wanted to work for something that I felt like was bettering our society.

Anyway, after my first year of employment discrimination litigation, I took an Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Fellowship at the Bar Association of San Francisco, creating a debt collection defense project for low-income debtors. That was really great, and I did that for two years, which was the longest period of time I could do it as an AmeriCorps Equal Justice Works Fellow. And then, I was in the recession. It was 2011 when that fellowship ended, and I had a very hard time finding a public interest job. I was having my second child at that time, too, so I just kind of took a couple years off and looked around, and learned about different organizations. I actually tried to start my own firm, which was actually going well, and it was advising families about the legal responsibilities of employing household help, such as nannies.

Lee Burgess: Oh, interesting. Yeah.

Allison Anderman: Yeah, and helping them draft employment contracts and understanding the tax implications of paying a nanny, et cetera. And I was doing that, but then I saw a job posting for what was then known as the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, and this was about a year after the Sandy Hook Elementary massacre. That really shook me, as it did our whole country, but I was nine months pregnant when it happened. Yeah. And I felt very strongly about doing what I could do prevent gun violence in our country, so applied for that job and I got it. And it's been four and a half years.

Lee Burgess: Wow. That's really interesting, and it's kind of fortuitous that you were able to see that job posting and that direction right on the heels of such a tragedy that had touched so many of us.

Allison Anderman: Yeah. I was very lucky that they were hiring, and that I was the right candidate at that time, because I definitely felt like that was the beginning of a real change in the gun violence prevention movement, so it's been very exciting to be a part of that movement over the last four to five years.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, what do you actually do as your job? I think whenever we interview practicing lawyers, we always like to ask you what you do and your job, because I think law students, people who are listening, often times don't have any idea what people do on a daily basis.

Allison Anderman: Right. I absolutely agree. I do public policy laws, and that's something that I didn't feel like I got a lot of exposure to in law school, and I didn't really understand how public policy worked really until I started doing it myself. So, I'm not a practicing attorney. I don't need to technically be an attorney to do the work that I do, and I certainly don't need to be licensed to do it, but being an attorney comes with a lot of advantages that make doing the job much easier in certain ways. So, I think a lot of people who do public policy are people who have been lawyers or are lawyers. And I still am actively licensed, but I don't go to court. Nothing I do requires being licensed.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: I work on legislation and other types of public policy that can prevent and reduce gun violence. What that means is, I ... So, I'm an expert on gun laws and how gun laws work in our country, and I use that expertise to help legislators conceive of laws that might reduce gun violence in their city, state, or even at the federal level. I often write laws myself, either specifically at the request of a legislator, or I will write a model law that is used by lobbyists to promote a particular policy.

I just serve as a resource to legislators and the media and the public about gun laws, so when there is a shooting that gets a lot of national attention, I often am called in to explain where there was a gap in the law that allowed this particular shooter to get a gun, or what kind of laws might have prevented this person from getting a gun, if the law had been in place in that state, or what was the failure in the laws. I also give a lot of presentations about gun violence and gun laws to different groups, activist groups, community groups, legislators, et cetera.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's really interesting. I think one of the things that I often forget when you talk about public policy is, you often hear about the big, high level federal public policy, or the state of California level. But I think a lot of times, people forget that when you are working on policy changes, or you are advising policy changes, it can be at so many different levels of the government system. Like you were saying, local governments. You're working with different parts of this big government machine that can invoke change, and it's not just trying to lobby at the federal level. It can be so multi-level.

Allison Anderman: That's absolutely right. Even beyond the actual legislative branch, at the local level, the city or town council, at the state level, the assembly or the senate. But there's also policy that can be enacted by other branches of the government such as the executive branch. The attorney general can also issue regulations that are very similar in their impact to laws, and that's particularly important when a jurisdiction may be prevented from passing a law. In California, we don't really have this problem, but in actually about 35 states in our country, the gun

lobby has succeeded in passing a type of preemption law that says that the state is the only entity that can pass gun laws. And local governments are prohibited from passing any type of gun law. So, in states like that, where especially particular cities may have really big issues with gun violence, so Baltimore is a good example, Maryland has strong state gun laws, but Maryland ... I'm sorry, Baltimore has a pretty big problem with urban community gun violence. But Maryland does have a firearms preemption law, which really limits what the city of Baltimore can do legislatively to address this issue.

So, we are working with cities like Baltimore in states where there's preemption to create gun violence prevention policies that are outside of the legislative area, such as trying to direct funding to violence intervention and prevention programs that are run by either city agencies or nonprofits. But we're working to actually ensure that the state directs funding there, so that these programs can thrive. That's one way to kind of get around these laws.

Lee Burgess: That's fascinating. A lot of this, the way that government works with policies, especially because of these hot button policies, is just something that's not really talked about in law schools. We're all still learning-

Allison Anderman: Right.

Lee Burgess: ... torts and contracts. It's pretty fascinating that there are these nuances of how this stuff is applied in the real world that I think you oftentimes don't get exposure to until you're working in that area.

Allison Anderman: Yeah, and I really wish that law schools would also focus on how laws are written, because law school focuses on the laws after they're written, and how they're applied, and how they are interpreted by the judicial branch, et cetera. But there's very little focus, at least in my experience, on how laws are created and written, and the legislative process. I think that's extremely important to understanding the legal system as well, so ...

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Allison Anderman: If I could do it all over again.

Lee Burgess: Sounds like a good class idea.

Allison Anderman: Right?

Lee Burgess: If there are any law school deans listening.

Allison Anderman: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: So, gun control is such a hot topic these days in light, as you said, of the heartbreaking mass shootings. Sandy Hook kind of being the one that I think a lot of people are thinking about, but even I think now after Parkland, where it really brought back up a lot of stuff about Columbine and things like that.

But given the policy work, writing laws, working with state legislatures and local organizations like you're talking about can be very slow moving. How does the work change when a mass shooting or a tragedy that gets a lot of news like this occurs? I would assume that things have to speed up or get more politically charged. How does your work change when that happens?

Allison Anderman: That's right, things definitely speed up after there's a mass shooting that gets a lot of national attention. Real policies do come out of those events. For example, in 2014, there was the shooting in Isla Visa near the UC Santa Barbara campus by a young man who his parents knew was dangerous. He had posted violent content online and made threats, and his parents were so concerned actually that they contacted his therapist, who contacted law enforcement. And law enforcement went and did a welfare check on him, but he was a very charming young man, and he was very calm, and law enforcement felt that they had no legal authority to intervene. They couldn't take him into custody under 5150, which is essentially when a person poses a danger to themselves or others.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: There was nothing that they could do. And then three weeks later, he killed six people. He shot three and stabbed three, and ran people over with his car. Just a really horrific set of circumstances. That event was the catalyst for a law in California known at the Gun Violence Restraining Order Law that allows a family member or a law enforcement officer to petition a court for an order that temporarily takes guns away from somebody who is demonstrated to be a threat to themselves or others.

That was really the first law of its kind in the country, but since Isla Vista in 2014, there have been a number of other shootings where there were similar indications that the shooter was dangerous before the shooting occurred. Parkland is the perfect example of that. The shooting in San Bernardino, the Pulse nightclub, and even before Isla Visa, the Tucson, Arizona shooting in which former congresswoman Gabby Giffords was shot in the head, and she now leads the organization that I work for.

So, these laws started to gain a lot of traction, and since 2014, five additional states other than California have now enacted these laws, including Florida and Vermont, which are two states that are typically very friendly to the gun lobbyists.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: So, I definitely think these shootings can be catalysts for certain types of policies. Another one is regulation and prohibitions of bump stocks, because a bump stock was used in the Las Vegas shooting, and it certainly increased the number of casualties, because it increased the shooter's rate of fire. There was one state, California, of course, that had prohibited bump stocks before Las Vegas, and now we have ... I think there are eight, and I believe Connecticut is just on the cusp of enacting a bump stock ban.

But, in addition to these specific policies that are kind of related to a shooting that occurred, I think these kinds of events really galvanize people, and legislators create a lot of momentum, and that actually leads to the enactment of other policies that are maybe less specifically related to the shooting.

Louisiana, for example, is close to passing a law that would facilitate taking guns away from domestic abusers. And that's in Louisiana, so I think that a lot can come from these shootings. Of course, we wish it didn't happen that way, but yeah, I think you're right that they really do speed things up.

Lee Burgess: It's almost like, based on what you're saying, that you need to have some of this foundation work of these ideas, of these policies, or some models of these policies working in some states that might be more favorable to enacting gun control, so when a tragedy strikes and the public outroar comes up and legislators want to take action, that you can say, "Oh, well, that's good, because we have a model that you can implement, so that things can move faster." Because writing laws and policies is hard. I mean, it's not like something you just go home and you do with a glass of wine after work.

Allison Anderman: Right.

Lee Burgess: I mean, maybe that's how you write policy, I don't know. I don't know.

Allison Anderman: No, it's actually quite complicated, and in some ways, the challenge is very exciting, but yes, it's ... What you're saying is absolutely correct, and in fact, the Gun Violence Restraining Order Law, which is known actually at the national or in other states as an Extreme Risk Protection Order Law was a policy that a consortium of experts in law, policy, mental health, et cetera had developed prior to Isla Vista, and because they had that policy ready to go, it was able to move very quickly through the legislature in California. The shooting actually happened in the spring of 2014, and the law was signed by Governor Brown in September or October of 2014.

Lee Burgess: That's incredible.

Allison Anderman: And that's extremely fast for such a sea changing policy.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah, it's fascinating. I think a lot of folks forget the groundwork that had to be laid to be able to move quickly when either political winds change or that there's a request for this kind of policy. There has to be so much background work before you can just show up with some new law to try and get through a legislative body.

Allison Anderman: Right. And I think something you said a few minutes ago, I think is really important, is that in states like California, we can get novel policies enacted, and they can ... So, we consider California somewhat of a policy incubator that we can then take to other states. States look to California to see what has been enacted, what's effective, and should we do that in our own state? So, I think that's another way to do it. And sometimes, honestly, we just write the policies really quickly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Well, sometimes you have to, right? I mean ...

Allison Anderman: Right.

Lee Burgess: It's interesting that you mention California being an incubator for gun control laws, because I have heard that there are other states, I think namely Florida, which are kind of used by the NRA as an incubator for I guess the opposite types of laws. I don't know what you would call them.

Allison Anderman: Right.

Lee Burgess: Gun access laws. So, being in a policy organization that I think has grown since you joined it, what does it feel like, though, to continually work against organizations and interest groups like the NRA that have so much money behind them, and so much political influence? Is it hard to do that fight, even if you truly believe that what you're doing is necessary and important?

Allison Anderman: Well, a few things. One, the gun violence prevention movement, and that's actually a point that I should make. Everybody does this, but we don't ever use the term gun control, because that is actually a term that the NRA coined to-

Lee Burgess: Interesting.

Allison Anderman: Right, to frame the language around this movement to make it sound like we were trying to control people and their guns. We discuss it in terms of gun violence prevention or gun safety, but the movement has grown so significantly since Sandy Hook. A number of very powerful organizations have been formed since then, one of which was Americans for Responsible Solutions, which Gabby Giffords and her husband, former NASA astronaut and Navy combat Vet, Mark

Kelly, formed. We have since merged with Americans for Responsible Solutions to form Giffords Law Center, even though we've been around for 25 years, since an also very well-known mass shooting at 101 California in San Francisco in 1993.

So, we're now much bigger and more influential, I think, than we used to be. Michael Bloomberg funded an organization called Every Town For Gun Safety, which is also a very dominant force in this movement. It merged with Moms Demand Action, which has ... I want to say millions of volunteers, and there have been other organizations as well that have formed. So, I don't actually feel like we're David versus Goliath. I feel that the gun violence prevention movement is well matched against the gun lobby, at least in terms of organizations and perhaps funding.

But I think the bigger problem, or the bigger challenge, I should say, is that ... and I don't feel like I'm fighting the NRA on a daily basis, but I do feel like I am fighting a misperception about guns that is I think very detrimental to our society and works against passing gun safety laws, and that misperception, or this cultural perception I guess of guns, is that guns will make you safer. The NRA and the gun lobby, because they need to sell guns, they peddle fear.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: They try to convince people that they need a gun to protect themselves from people of color and immigrants, and deranged mentally ill people, which are not really true. For example, mentally ill people are much more likely to be the victims of violence rather than the perpetrators, et cetera. But they peddle this fear so that they can sell guns.

And the data actually shows that you are much more likely, much, much more likely to be the victim of gun violence if you keep a gun in the home. And, that if you are actually attacked by a person with a gun, you are more likely to be injured if you have a gun.

Lee Burgess: I don't know if I'd heard that one. I knew about the guns in the home.

Allison Anderman: Right. But I think that when you're trying to convince people to see things differently, data is much less effective than emotion. We also know that from research. So, it can be very challenging to fight back against the culture of fear and the fear mongering that the gun lobby puts forth. And you see this play out after certain types of shootings. For example, school shootings. The gun lobby ... I mean, obviously we're all afraid of school shootings.

Lee Burgess: Of course we are. And you and I are both parents. How can you not think about this stuff?

Allison Anderman: Exactly. Exactly. It's easier, even for me, to believe that if my child's teacher had a gun, that they would be able to shoot an intruder. But the facts just do not support that. It is much more likely that that gun held by the teacher is going to be used to harm the teacher or their students, and that a teacher cannot react in a mass shooting situation to disarm an assailant.

But after these mass shootings at schools, we see legislators in all these states passing bills or introducing bills to arm teachers, because it's the fear response. It's not the logical response. It's not the data evidence-based policy. So I think that's the biggest challenge for me in this.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's really interesting. I also like the fact that some of the organizations ... And I think it might be Every Town or Moms Demand Action that have really also tried to reach out to folks with talking points about how to talk about this stuff. I know something you and I have had conversations about on social media has been about with groups of moms trying to decide whether or not you ask if there are guns in the house when you do play dates with their kids. And I know this is a bigger issue in places maybe outside of California, but I think sometimes even ... I'll learn that someone has a gun in their house, and I'm surprised to know that they have guns in their house.

I like the fact that within this movement, I think for folks who are trying to navigate this on a personal level, that some of these organizations are helping you figure out how to discuss this, because it is such an emotional topic. But, like you said, you're combating a messaging around fear and, "Why wouldn't I have a gun?" And how do you talk to somebody and basically say, "I'm not trying to threaten your right to have a handgun in your house, or whatever you might have, but I need to know before I send my kid there what's in the house," in the same way they ask, "Do you have a pool?"

Allison Anderman: Right.

Lee Burgess: Or, "My kid has a peanut allergy. Where do you keep your peanuts?"

Allison Anderman: Right.

Lee Burgess: I think. And I am impressed at some of the materials that I have seen to help people with language to talk about this, even on kind of a more personal level, because I think, like you said, because of the messaging and how emotionally charged this is for everybody on both sides, it's a really hard thing to talk about.

Allison Anderman: Right. Yes, I think that's true, and I think you're right that this is probably a much harder topic in certain states, unlike California. But I think that it's so important that people ask, and I will say that I started asking probably about four years ago, when I started doing this work, when my daughter was old enough to play

independently. So, even if I go to a new person's house with her, if we're invited over for dinner, I will ask if the family has guns, because even if I'm there, I may not be with her every second.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: And I have never ... I have had people say, "Yes, we have guns," and I have followed up with, "Okay. How do you keep them stored?" Just so that I know that my kid wouldn't accidentally come into contact with a gun. And I have never had anyone react badly to that question. I've been told how the guns were stored, and I think then it comes down to how comfortable are you trusting the information that you've been given? And do you ask, "Can I see?"

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: But it is a very hard conversation to have, but I always tell people when I talk about this subject, "What would be worse?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Allison Anderman: "Offending someone? Maybe they don't want to be your friend anymore because you've asked this question. Or having your child find a gun and shoot and kill themselves or someone else?"

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: It is hard, but as parents, we have to protect our children, and we have to do hard things sometimes.

Lee Burgess: That's true. And I will make sure that we link to some of these materials that are available online with some of these recommended talking points on the show notes, if this is something that interests folks, because I do think these conversations are hard, but the only way we make them easier is to continue having them, so they become more of a norm.

I grew up around law enforcement, and law enforcement was always talking about guns. And when law enforcement would become parents, they would talk about how they were going to store their guns. I remember my dad having a good friend who the husband and wife were both FBI agents, and when they decided to start a family, they ... I think I was at a dinner as a child, because this is what happens when you grow up in a law enforcement community. And they're talking about that this is something they had to spend a lot of time thinking about; what would they do to both be continuing to be FBI agents, and to also be safe parents? And I think in the law enforcement community, that's so discussed, because I felt like growing up, firearms were something that were

very respected for being very powerful and dangerous, and it's just interesting how it was easier to talk about it with people who are around them all the time, than with people who aren't.

Allison Anderman: This is true, and in my experience, most gun owners understand why it is so important to safely store your gun, and I don't get any pushback from those people. In fact, in my own town in California, in the suburb of San Francisco, I worked in my own community to get a safe storage law enacted, and that's a law that requires a gun owner to keep their gun locked up or disabled when they're not carrying the gun. That is to ensure that nobody who is unauthorized, like a child or even a burglar, can access that gun.

I had a cop on my side in this. He was a very helpful community member to push through this law, because he said, "Of course. Why would anyone oppose this kind of law? Leaving your gun accessible is just a really big public safety risk." So he got it, and I found that most people got it. And he happens to also be the father of one of my daughter's friends, and she goes and plays at their house all the time, and of course he has guns; he's a cop.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: But he keeps his gun in a gun safe. The minute he walks in the door, he locks up his gun in the gun safe. And I do think that this kind of comes back to this culture of fear, that discussion that we were having. I think the people who are opposed to safe storage laws feel that if it takes them an extra couple of seconds to get their gun, their lives are in jeopardy, and they can't sleep with a gun on their body, so they would have to be required to safely store it at night.

But ... and actually, the Ninth Circuit looked at this law in San Francisco, and upheld the law as being constitutional under the Second Amendment, because the court said that the evidence showed that you could get a gun out of many types of commonly available and affordable gun safes within a matter of a few seconds, and that the delay of a few seconds to access your gun, even if you buy the idea that you need a gun to protect yourself from harm, the delay of a few seconds was reasonable to prevent all of the harms associated with leaving a gun unlocked.

Lee Burgess: Interesting.

Allison Anderman: So, I do think that the people who oppose these kinds of laws are doing it out of this very deep-seated, but frankly irrational fear.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. That's fascinating. Well, let's switch gears a little bit, because one of the things that I think is interesting about your role in the organization where you work today, is you have started doing media and press.

You've testified before government entities. I mean, I know you were an amazing TA doing civil procedure lectures back when we were in law school, which we won't admit how many years ago this was at that point, because it makes me feel really old.

But was this something that you had to get comfortable with in this new role? Was this something that had always been easy to you? I know you've even done talking head spots on I think Fox News, which is not going to be a warm and fuzzy reception for somebody with your viewpoint and your background. So, how did you kind of get comfortable with doing this very public role?

Allison Anderman: I had always been pretty comfortable with public speaking as a kid, and even as a young adult. I did a lot of acting, so I did have that going for me. But doing this type of public speaking as an expert on an issue I think was much harder than I anticipated, and I think it was less about the public speaking aspect, and more just feeling like I needed to know exactly what I was talking about, and I needed to have very good responses, because lots of people were going to be watching me, and it's scary. I mean, it is very scary.

But, the more you do it, the more comfortable you get doing it. That's absolutely true, and the more years of expertise I've developed, the more confident I am that I have the answers and that I know what I'm talking about. So it's a lot easier for me now than it used to be for those various reasons.

But the other thing is, really, the more you do it, the less scary it is. I always find that unfortunately, a mass shooting will happen, and my organization will get just dozens and dozens and dozens of requests from the media for a period of a couple of weeks, and so I may do four or five appearances on television or radio in a two week period, and I always find that the first one in that series is so much harder than the fifth.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: Because you just get comfortable. So, I think that especially for law students, and this is really not very different from speaking in the courtroom, in fact.

Lee Burgess: It's true.

Allison Anderman: In a lot of ways, I found speaking before a judge even more intimidating, because I was representing a client, and it was their livelihood or whatnot at stake, and I felt a lot of responsibility, and judges, I also felt, were looking to ask you that one question. They knew exactly how to ask the one question that you were the least confident about.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: Which is not true of the media. But I think that just as a suggestion to law students, take as many opportunities as you can to do public speaking, because as hard as it is ... and this is really true of anything that's hard for you. If writing is hard for you, write as much as you can. If public speaking is hard, do it as much as you can, because you will get better at it.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely.

Allison Anderman: But only if you do it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, one of my good friends in law school, I think either thought she was going to throw up or was going to throw up before our moot court arguments, and now she's a very successful litigator, and she goes to court all the time. She just had to ... That was the type of law she wanted to practice. She knew that she was going to have to go to court, but it did get easier. But that wasn't her comfort zone. But she just had to make it work, and now I think she's ... you know, she doesn't think twice going into a courtroom anymore.

Allison Anderman: It's so true. I had the same experience with a friend in law school. She sat next to me in most of my classes, and she was terrified to raise her hand in a law school classroom, which I found to be very low stakes.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Allison Anderman: So I raised my hand all the time. But she was terrified, and similarly terrified of doing moot court. But she desperately wanted to be a public defender, and now she is in the courtroom more than any other person I know who went to law school. She does trials. It's all speaking in front of a jury, speaking to a judge, and you just do it. If it's what you want to do, you make it happen.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. We have a great podcast that we did recently on getting more comfortable with public speaking, so I'll link to it in the show notes, because I think if this is something that is not easy for you ... Well, I mean, it's not really easy for anyone, but I also did a lot of acting and musicals, and performing, so I think it was easier for me than it was for a lot of my friends, who weren't into putting themselves in any sort of spotlight, or standing in front of a group of people. But there are a lot of things you can do during law school to cultivate this skill so when you get out, you're in a better place than where you started.

Well, I think ... Allison, one of the things that we're seeing in the trends around people going to law school is that LSAT numbers, the people sitting for the LSAT, are starting to rise. And it sounds like, based on the feedback that is being shared in the media, that a lot of people are heading to law school due to the current political climate. So, for our listeners that might be incoming law school students or are maybe 1Ls and they are interested in doing public interest, or

the type of advocacy work along the lines of what you do, what do you think they should be doing in law school to set the stage, so they can do this sort of work when they graduate?

Allison Anderman: Well, it can be difficult to get a public interest job right out of law school, because public interest organizations have limited resources, and we are looking to hire people who can hit the ground running. So not often, people straight out of law school. But, I would say the exception to that is, if we are hiring a more entry-level attorney and that attorney has had a demonstrated record of working in similar types of organizations or doing similar type of work ... So, interestingly, at my organization, a person who has done a lot of direct legal services wouldn't necessarily be a good fit, because even though we're public interest, we're public policy. We don't do direct legal services.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Allison Anderman: So we would be looking for someone who has worked for a legislator, or had a more research and writing focused job. But, I know that when I worked in direct services organizations, they were looking for the opposite. So my suggestion would be, think about what kind of work you might want to do, and focus your internships and externships and summers at similar organizations. It doesn't necessarily have to be the same issue, but just a similar type of work. If you think you want to do direct legal services, and maybe you want to do it in immigration, sure. If you can do internships at an immigration direct legal services organization, that's great.

But I also think it's good to have experiences doing other types of work, and doing that work in other organizations serving a different community, because I think getting that broad range of knowledge can help you, especially if you're working with certain underserved communities. It's helpful if you can know about public benefits and domestic violence, and criminal law if you're going to be working with people who might be having immigration issues, because there will be ... those issues will arise as well.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah, that's really interesting. Do you think just general volunteering, as well, even if ... Let's say you can't necessarily get a job in the area. Let's go back to your example of immigration. If immigration is your passion, but there aren't any job or internship opportunities in immigration, do you think there's value in volunteering with issues around immigration, or in some sort of direct service organization that's helping immigrants file paperwork, or even providing support for children, just to show your passion for and your commitment to that issue? Do you think that's a good way to kind of also add credibility to your resume around this type of work?

Allison Anderman: Absolutely. Especially if there is an organization that you do want to work for, but you're not able to get a job there right away, if they have opportunities for lawyers, I would do those, because then you're going to be the first to know if they're hiring. They're going to know you, and I've seen a number of people get jobs that way.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's really, really good advice. We're running out of time, but before we finish up, if our listeners want to learn more about what they can do or how they can get involved in gun violence prevention, where do you think are some of the first resources they should go to? And we can include these links in the show notes.

Allison Anderman: It really varies, depending on what state you're in. If you're in California, I think that ... and you want to work on state level issues. I think getting involved in Moms Demand Action or the Brady Campaign are good places to start. If you want to work to get a gun law passed in your own community, you can contact me. I can tell you kind of what's on the books already, and what you might want to advocate for. But then it would be really important to start your own network. Much easier to do things at the local level than it is at the state level, and because I work a lot in California at the state level, the influential groups are kind of already set up. But Moms and Brady do drive a lot of people to legislative hearings, so that's a good thing.

But if you're in a state outside of California, I would look to see if there is a state based grouped doing work at the state level. Just Google maybe gun violence prevention Illinois, for example, and then reach out to that group to see how you can get involved. But I think those are probably ... I think focusing on the state groups as opposed to the national groups is more effective.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's really great insight. Well, this has been a fascinating discussion. Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule and sharing your experiences and your thoughts on this incredibly important topic. We really appreciate it. I know you're busy.

Allison Anderman: Thanks. Thank you so much, Lee. It's been really fun.

Lee Burgess: Awesome. Well, if you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com, or you can always contact us via our website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon.

RESOURCES:

- Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence: Managing Attorney Allison Anderman
- Giffords Law Center Fact Sheet: Extreme Risk Protection Orders
- Giffords Law Center Fact Sheet: Child Access Prevention
- Podcast Episode 138: Top Ten Public Speaking Tips (w/Jennifer Warren)
- Moms Demand Action California Facebook Page
- Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence