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Professor Follis
Dan Harty

Ellen McGrory Interview (Mom, relative in social distancing group)

Probation Officer retired during pandemic outbreak

Ellen McGrory worked as an Adult Probation Officer for Cook County since 1990. For nearly 30 years, she served some of the most vulnerable people in the Chicagoland area. With her service ending abruptly, because of COVID-19, she shares how the experience has been since retiring from the Adult Probation Department. In addition, some questions were formulated to reflect the reports of Cook County jail being one of the hottest spots in the world, in regards to spreading Coronavirus.

Patrick: What was your position?

Ellen: As a probation officer for the Cook County Adult Probation Department, an officer conducts interviews both in and out of custody and prepared reports for court. Working with so many clients from diversified background was very challenging and rewarding. Towards the end of my career I monitored 306 defendants where their bonds were reduced. They were released on recognizance. Overall, I enjoyed my job because I liked working with criminals and it was challenging.

Patrick: How has your retirement been since March 31st, 2020? Did the COVID-19 pandemic effect your retirement?

Ellen: I was originally planning to retire recently. The coronavirus pandemic has impacted me tremendously. My 401k had to be reevaluated for fear of significant loss. I had concern for my son, who was still living as a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign because of his health and safety. The disappointment of the real estate market at this time has affected the ability to put my house on the market. My life since the retirement has lifted some stress and anxiety, but at the same time it has relived some. Talking everyday about the virus is draining but being retired is a pleasure. COVID-19 pandemic led to reduction of bonds, overcrowding, and less supervisors at work.

Patrick: How do the reports of Cook County jail being one of the largest hot spots in the world make you feel?

Ellen: Sometimes I worked in the Cook County jail, but most of the time I was at the courthouse. My position entailed me to venture to the jail. Unfortunately, there is not much there can be done but provide the intimates and officers with PPE. They have only a few divisions open in the jail. Because of lack of funds, the amount of buildings to house the intimates have been closed. This is has led to Cook County jail being one of the most contagious places of coronavirus reported in the world.

Patrick: How did conditions and protocol change after the new restrictions of COVID-19 at your place work before your retirement?

Ellen: Some officers were assigned limited in person reporting. Other than bond cases, court cases have been continued one month at a time. Social distancing led to more phone call interviews rather than reporting in person.

Patrick: What were the sanitary conditions like? Can you explain in detail?

Ellen: There was no deep cleaning sanitation until several weeks after the stay at home order was issued. There were not enough cleaning supplies to keep the printers and copies clean. We were told to keep a distance from each other. The bathroom conditions were below standard before the pandemic, as there was not enough paper towels and toilet paper. There were problems before the pandemic, and the coronavirus outbreak easily worsened the situation. People were so desperate for supplies that the community office hand sanitizer pump was taken in the same day it was distributed.

Patrick: What are your plans now that you are retired?

Ellen: My plans with my son are to downsize the home. Currently we live on the northwest side of Chicago. After putting our house on the market, I will be researching property in the western states. This includes Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, and South Dakota.