



Eric Cramer (2020-2021)

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Interviewed Feb. 2022 at Public Justice Board meeting in Palm Desert, CA

Public Justice: What was it like being Board Chair of Public Justice during COVID?

Eric Cramer (Past President 2020-2021): It was very challenging. And it was a challenging time to be president, I think, of any organization. It was challenging for everyone in the world, really, but it was challenging to run or help run a board and help work with the staff when everyone was dealing with a global pandemic and trying to keep people positive and engaged and involved when there was a lot of concern about everyone's safety; and then, secondarily, about the survival of the organization. And so, that was a challenging time, but I think with the help of other excellent board members and incredible staff, I think we got through it really well.

PJ: This is the 40th anniversary of Public Justice. Can you share, from your perspective, what the arc of the organization has been?

Cramer: Well, I wasn't involved from the very beginning, but I have been involved for well over 10 years, close to 20 years, probably, maybe 15 years. But from my perspective, the organization has evolved from an incredible group -- a small group of trial lawyers who were trying to use the law and the courts to improve the lives of people, and it has expanded its scope, both in terms of who's on the board and who the organization serves. And so, the organization has been developed from an organization that focused on access to justice issues and some other issues surrounding making courts available for the average person and just broadened its scope and accomplishes so much more.

Our budget has expanded. Our board has expanded. Our staff has greatly expanded, and so, we can accomplish a lot more and do a lot more with the access to justice that we've achieved for our clients and for consumers and for the country.

PJ: Where do you think you see Public Justice going now?

Cramer: I think it's going to continue developing and expanding and adapting and being opportunistic about things that we can do to help the constituencies that the organization supports.

I think there's going to be a big push for racial justice and gender justice and DEI issues, both on the board and as a lens for the kinds of cases that we take on and the communities that we help. And so, I think it's going to develop in that way while continuing with the core issues that the organization has always been about, about making justice and the courts available for everyone, then proving that in some specific ways, with regard to food and food justice and debtor's rights and environmental issues and civil rights for students, in particular, and for others. So, I think we're going to develop those areas and add a racial justice and gender justice lens to those areas.

PJ: "Trial lawyers" seem to have something of a negative image -- thanks a lot to propaganda from conservative media. But having met many of you, Public Justice seems almost like a family -- a family that fights upon occasion, has disputes, but there is a real authentic sense of service here and family.

Cramer: Well, we're people who care about other people and about the other people who we're working with. But trial lawyers are people who represent average Americans, average human beings, and trying to make lives better for all of those people.

The other thing about trial lawyers is that, ultimately, we need to take complicated concepts and issues and explain them to juries, to people who aren't lawyers. So part of that is empathy and being able to explain and convince others of wrongs that have been done to your clients and to groups.

I do class action law and I do antitrust cases, and we need to take complicated economic concepts and explain them so people can understand them and be empathetic with your clients about what's been wrong and done wrong to them. And so, I think that kind of empathy creates community among the other people who are doing that and the people that we work for.

PJ: Anything more you want to say about Public Justice and how it's grown and evolved?

Cramer: I think it's an incredible organization and it's really incredible how it's grown under the incredible leadership that we've had, including Paul and others who run the organization.

I think it's also building on its roots. There are founders of this organization that are still involved decades later -- and that's a testament to the organization. And we're building upon those roots and the things that those people have created and going further into the future and helping more people in different ways.