

AMY MARIE BERGER

Mr. Dan Ruben, Esq.
Executive Director at Equal Justice America
Building II-Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, Virginia 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I interned at the Support Center for Child Advocates in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Support Center for Child Advocates is a non-profit organization composed of staff attorneys and social workers who work alongside volunteer attorneys to advocate for abused and neglected children in Philadelphia, with the goal of securing a permanent, nurturing environment for every child.

During my internship I was assigned a variety of cases on which I worked in conjunction with staff attorneys and social workers at the Support Center. My clients included children as young as two years old and as old as thirteen. I worked on cases involving medically needy children, children involved in the delinquency system, and children in need of support during the criminal trial of someone who perpetrated a crime against them.

I was given the opportunity to perform a number of the same tasks as the staff attorneys at the Support Center. I conducted research utilized to litigate contested issues in court and elsewhere. I also litigated two issues before the court myself. I kept in contact with a variety of important players in the dependency court system including: foster care social workers, Department of Human Services (DHS) case workers, volunteer attorneys, staff attorneys, staff social workers, teachers, counselors, caregivers, city solicitors, and others. I participated in planning meetings, hearings, and a number of trainings. I also visited clients at their homes or shelters. I kept detailed records of every contact and every event I observed. I also wrote reports in which I explained and analyzed what happened when I visited clients in their homes and when I observed criminal matters.

One of the cases that meant the most to me was that of a girl who I will refer to as "Megan" to protect her true identity. Megan's father was on trial for committing a crime against her and the Support Center was appointed to support Megan throughout the trial. Megan's father was incarcerated and Megan's mother was unable to care for her. Megan had to move in with a family friend because she did not have any other family who could care for her while her parents were unavailable. When someone takes in another person's child under these kinds of circumstances, they can contact DHS to seek assistance through kinship care. Kinship care provides caregivers with resources to help care for a dependent child¹ including money, health

¹ "Dependent child" is defined in 42 Pa.C.S.A. § 6302 and includes a child who is without proper care or control, subsistence, education as required by law, or other care or control necessary for his physical, mental, or emotional health, or morals. A dependent child is also defined as a child who is without a parent, guardian, or legal custodian. There are a number of other definitions for dependent child. Megan's parents were unavailable or not capable of caring for her and Megan's family friend did not have legal custody of her at the time, therefore Megan could be considered a dependent child.

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insurance, psychological counseling, and other services. The family friend was confused about this process and decided not to accept the services because at the time the services were offered she did not understand what the services were and what role DHS would play in Megan's life if she accepted help. As a result, the family friend was struggling to afford Megan's care on her own.

A social worker and I visited Megan at the caregiver's home to introduce ourselves and through that meeting we learned about the caregiver's struggle to afford Megan's care and to handle issues related Megan's developmental delays and trauma. At this visit I also got acquainted with Megan. I learned about her likes and dislikes. I began to bond with Megan by showing her pictures of my dog and telling her stories about my dog's antics. I also learned that Megan was afraid of being taken away from her caregiver. I gained Megan's trust and as a result I was able to obtain more information from Megan and her caregiver which I used to help draft a petition to open a dependency case in Family Court. The purpose of this petition was to get Family Court involved in Megan's case so that her new caregiver could receive the financial support and resources she needed to care for Megan.

Following the visit, my supervisor and I went to review DHS files on Megan and her family. We used this file to understand the dynamics of Megan's family and to see what needs Megan may have had in the past that have been unresolved. The petition I drafted will either cause the city's Law Department to file their own petition or else the Support Center will file the petition I helped draft. It meant so much to me to be involved in drafting this petition because I feel that I contributed to Megan's advocacy by encouraging the system to recognize her needs and to address them.

Sincerely,

Amy Marie Berger
Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University
Candidate for *Juris Doctor*, May 2011

August 3, 2010

Equal Justice America
Attn: Dan Ruben

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am pleased to write regarding Equal Justice/Intern Amy Berger. Amy has been a Summer Intern with the *Support Center for Child Advocates*, from late May and will be here through August 6, 2010. I was/am Amy's supervising attorney for her internship.

Amy seamlessly transitioned from being a second year law student to an intern handling many of the same responsibilities as our staff attorneys. Amy's general responsibilities at *Child Advocates* mirrored those of most other second year summer interns and to an extent, those of a newly licensed and practicing attorney. However, Amy interned and practiced in the context of Child Welfare/Child Advocacy Law, an area that many highly experienced attorneys, let alone interns, often find daunting.

Notwithstanding the uniqueness of this area of the law and Amy's still student status, her work product was always professional, efficient and highly competent.

Amy's writing, researching and "people" skills were excellent. Often Amy would be assigned a research project that was vague in nature as the issues were at times still developing. Despite the unstructured nature of certain assignments or little guidance as to where a specific authority could be found, she always was able to quickly process, research and produce on-point authority in response to the many legal issues she was asked to explore.

In addition to the research and writing, Amy also was part of our team of representation of our child clients and went on "home visits", prepared discovery and pleadings, and attending hearings. Amy favorite question was/is "what else can I do". Amy's diligence and her *in*experience in this area allowed her to dive into cases with "fresh eyes" and a different perspective regarding existing issues.

Of particular note regarding Amy's internship and in addition to the above was her research and writing in the following areas:

- Domestic Relations standing and standard of review issues;

- Evidentiary standards regarding Custody issues in Domestic Relations Court;
- Working extensively on a victim of crime case with dependency elements, and in doing so, did home visits, reviewed the file at DHS, and drafted a dependency petition
- Researched ethics issues as they pertained to the Court and counsel

The *Support Center for Child Advocates* was fortunate to have Amy as an intern. I'm sure Drexel feels the same regarding Amy as a student. She will make a fine attorney.

Should you have questions please feel free to call.

Very truly yours,

Barry Kassel