

October 14, 2016

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This past summer, I worked for Columbus Community Legal Services as a Certified Student Attorney. This was a continuation of my participation as a clinical student in the Spring 2016 semester with the Families and the Law Clinic. Over the summer, I was given the opportunity to work with the Civil Practice Clinic. In both clinics, I learned that Washington, DC has the largest number of *pro se* parties in the area, especially within the Superior Court for the District of Columbia. This is when I realized how important low-income clinics and legal services are to people who cannot represent themselves.

I had exceptional mentors who taught me about the many different aspects of litigation ranging from low-level status hearings to complete trials. As a clinical student, I gained a lot of courtroom experience and was able to pursue my passion in front of real judges and litigating real issues rather than in a mock setting. I also was able to work one-on-one with clients and this taught me that every client's circumstances were different, which impacted how the clinic represented them before the judge. In each of the cases that I worked on, I learned the specific facts and applied them to the law to achieve the outcome that the client wanted.

One of my clients the clinic represented was a mother in a child support action. The mother spoke very little English and the father spoke only Spanish. The father was order to make monthly child support payments to the mother. When I took on the case, the father had not paid child support in four months. While getting the child support payment should have been an easy task, there were several hoops that I had to jump through before I could ask the father to remit the payments. I had to work with the Child Support Services Division in Washington, DC to verify payments and research current law regarding debt collection practices. I sent two letters to the father asking him to remit payment, but with no response. Finally, at the end of my internship, I learned that the father had made payments for all four months. The mother was so happy when I called to tell her and the satisfaction I got from knowing that I was able to help her is unexplainable.

The other main case I worked on involved child custody and child support. The clinic represented the mother and the father was represented by counsel in Washington, DC. In 2014, the court issued a custody order that was fairly equal to both parties. However, at a hearing the following February, the judge issued a completely different order giving sole physical and legal custody to the father with no rights of visitation to the mother. After two years, the mother sought our help because she wanted to be involved in her son's life again. Throughout the summer, the supervising attorney and I worked on her case relentlessly to draft a proposed order for custody. We were able to negotiate amenable pick up and drop off locations and times

because visitation was very difficult with the mother's work schedule. After months of back and forth, the order was finally entered in August and gave the mother joint legal custody of her son. This was a big win for her and there were a lot of points in the order that were contentious. The mother was so relieved that she would not have to constantly ask the father for visitation and it was no longer completely on his terms.

Working at the clinic taught me much more than I thought was possible and it solidified my desire to help those who cannot help themselves by providing a voice for them in the legal system when they would not otherwise have one.

Sincerely,

Devin Barrett
Catholic University of America
Columbus School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2017