

Dan Ruben

Executive Director, Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My name is Elizabeth Wolfe, I am a current law student attending Duquesne University School of Law and recipient of an Equal Justice America Fellowship. This summer I have had the opportunity of interning at the Johnstown office of Laurel Legal Services. During my time at Laurel Legal Services I have dealt primarily with Protection from Abuse, Custody, Landlord/Tenant, and Unemployment Compensation clients. I had no idea how much I would thoroughly enjoy providing equal access to justice at a non-profit, public-interest law firm.

What led me to apply to for the Equal Justice America Fellowship was my time spent at the Duquesne University School of Law Family Law Clinic working with clients below the 150% poverty line. My clinical experience opened my eyes widely to the dire need of underserved clients to have attorneys advocating on behalf of their rights. From the Family Law Clinic, I had a basic idea of what I would do at a position in legal aid for the summer.

Family law is the area of law that truly holds my passion. Not everyone shares the passion for family law that I have, but some find this type of law truly fulfilling. During my undergraduate degree and early on in law school I started to realize that this was one area that I am truly avid about because of the ability I have to help direct individuals in need through difficult periods in their everyday lives. Laurel Legal Services gave me further insight into the issues that the citizens in my own home town deal with every day, custody wise and beyond.

At Laurel Legal Services I also had the opportunity to help interview clients for any type of brief or extended service that brought the client into the office. I learned by accompanying and observing the attorneys from Laurel Legal during Unemployment Compensation hearings, Custody Pre-trial's or Full Custody Hearings, and also Protection From Abuse hearings. This is the type of experience that I did not receive in law school and I do believe the Courtroom experience is a vital part of my education. At Laurel Legal we also had many clients battling Landlord/Tenant issues, general Bankruptcy questions, and Mortgage foreclosures.

Over the course of the summer I completed two flow-charts that will serve as hand-outs to clients who come into the office seeking legal advice or assistance. These flow-charts consisted of the basic laws and practice of family law and landlord/tenant law for Cambria

County. The purposes of these two flow-charts are to help clients to better understand what they have already gone through or what may be coming next in the process of their legal dilemmas. I also researched many other family law issues, unemployment compensation issues, and specifically foreign load issues pertaining to landlord/tenant law.

The clients that I helped assist at Laurel Legal this summer did not cause or contribute to their own struggles. I enjoyed working in public interest this summer and being able to make a small difference in the lives of the clients that I served and also gaining valuable hands on experience at the same time. The individuals that find themselves in need of Laurel Legal's Services do not have the means to individually help themselves and providing assistance to them helps to make them feel like they too have a voice. Clients come to Laurel Legal Services because they are unable to afford a local attorney to assist them during the difficult times in their lives. If legal aid did not exist, these citizens would be at risk of losing their children, homes, income, and so much more.

Although I grew up in the Cambria County area, I did not suffer through or understand the same struggles as the clients that I have served this summer. I have learned over the course of the summer to pay more attention to the people directly affected by injustice in the community in which we live. I realized quickly that it wasn't the efficiency of the representation we provided to clients that made them happy and put a smile on their face during this difficult time, it was the fact that they had someone standing in their corner representing them at all that changed their outlook. Furthermore, working in a public interest office through the summer helped me to feel like I was giving back to the county in which I was raised in, helping the people who needed it most. I hope that in my future after law school I find a position that makes me feel as though I am helping people to see the better days ahead when they can advocate for themselves, as they are suffering through the dark days in their lives.

Elizabeth Wolfe
Duquesne University School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2018
Laurel Legal Services



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August 31, 2017

Mr. Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

RE: Elizabeth Wolfe – Summer Intern

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am the Managing Attorney for the Johnstown Office of Laurel Legal Services and I have had the pleasure of working with Elizabeth Wolfe as an Intern for the Summer of 2017.

Elizabeth has a conviction for helping individuals in need. I witnessed her working closely with the clients to understand their cases as well as resolving their frustration with the legal system. Sometimes, there are not enough attorneys to go around and all we can provide is solid advice on how to proceed with a case. Elizabeth was able to help us resolve some unmet needs in the areas of custody and eviction proceedings by creating flow charts for the clients in order to better visualize their cases and understand the process. Sometimes it is easier to see the next step in the process rather than be told what it is.

More than anything else, I would like to think that Elizabeth gained firsthand knowledge and a greater understanding of the unmet needs within our legal system. There are so many people who need our help and the limited triage we can do does not always reach the depth of the problem. It was encouraging to see Elizabeth develop an appreciation for Civil Gideon in a day and age when other new attorneys are only concerned with ascending the corporate ladder. It was within the last year that a prominent attorney gave advice in the Pennsylvania Legal Journal to new lawyers and stated that they should build their career first and do pro bono later in their career. That is the attitude that we are faced with every day. It was a shining moment to learn that Elizabeth understands the need to develop a career and simultaneously be benevolent and caring to individuals who are in need of help. I only wish there were more like her willing to accept that challenge.

I am grateful to your organization, as is Elizabeth, and I hope that in time there will be other students following in her footsteps through our door. In this day and age of so many funding cuts, it is difficult to maintain a presence in any community. But having a willing advocate onboard leaves me hopeful that we can and will fulfill the unmet needs in our community.



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I have a concern that law schools may teach people how to be lawyers and lawyer like. But there is no substitute for meeting real people who are suffering through difficult and impossible situations. Elizabeth approached everyone with dignity and respect. I can only hope that she has learned a few lessons that will remain with her for years to come.

I wish her a long and happy career.

Very truly yours,



Charles Himmelreich
Managing Attorney, Johnstown Office