

August 27, 2012

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II - Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road, Midlothian, VA 23112
(804) 744-4200

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to follow up about my Equal Justice America summer fellowship with the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) in New Orleans, LA. My fellowship at the GNOFHAC was an extremely hands-on experience; it helped me develop my skills and it also allowed me to directly impact many clients.

I know that my fellowship helped me develop my legal skills. I conducted several client intakes. I mostly worked on Fair Lending issues. Many of our clients took out their mortgage several years ago. I had to probe into their problems using tact and determination. I worked on refining my ability to ask probing questions that would stir their memory. Additionally, I found that a large part of working with clients is simply listening to their situation in a compassionate manner. A large part of working with clients was simply being there to listen to their situation.

During my time at the GNOFHAC I was able to directly assist many clients under the supervision of Shontee Smothers, a staff attorney. After training, I was allowed to conduct intakes on my own and report the results to our attorneys. I also would research different legal avenues we could use to protect our clients. For example, for one client I found that her Fair Housing Act claims were time barred by the statute of limitation. However, I also discovered a violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. We can use this violation to bring an action against the party attempting to foreclose on her home. Additionally, I helped research a number of fair lending laws including, for example, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, the Real Estate Settlement Practices Act, and the Truth in Lending Act.

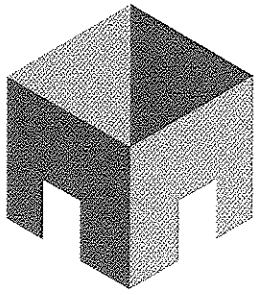
Now that I have worked at the GNOFHAC as a legal fellow, I am going to try to work as an attorney in the area of civil rights and consumer protection at graduation. I believe that this area is significantly underserved. I am applying for an Equal Justice Works grant to advocate on the behalf of domestic violence survivors. However, even if I do not get that grant I plan on attempting to make my goal of helping those who need it a reality. If I have to go solo to work in the area of civil rights, I will.

I would like to thank the Equal Justice America (EJA) program. Without this grant I would have been strained over the summer with financial difficulty. I believe that having paid opportunities is essential to making pro bono work possible. While experience is valuable, everyone – students included – has to pay for housing and living costs. EJA helped make my fellowship a possibility and I sincerely appreciate it.

Sincerely,

Garret DeReus

Tulane



GREATER NEW ORLEANS FAIR HOUSING ACTION CENTER

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September 13, 2012

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing you regarding Garret DeReus and his fellowship at the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action. I am the head staff attorney of the fair lending division. Over the summer Garret has greatly assisted us and our clients by conducting client intakes and by drafting memos, complaints, and other internal documents.


Garret did an amazing job working with our clients. He listened to what they had to say and inquired into their situation using precise yet compassionate questions. We often have clients that have forgotten many of the details of their situation. This can make obtaining information from them difficult. Garret was always patient and listened to their entire story. Typically our intakes usually take more than half an hour. By the end of each intake Garret was able to clearly explain to me the client's situation in one of two sentences. I appreciated his ability to quickly understand their situation and clarify what is often a jumble of facts.

Over the course of his fellowship Garret helped us research several laws that we plan on using protect our clients. Over the summer he developed a document that summarizes every fair lending law. This research will ensure that none of our clients fall through the cracks. Further, Garret was invaluable in conducting legal research for our clients under my guidance. He went above and beyond to review our clients' issues and assess them in the context of all possible causes of action. I am sure that Garret will do his best to preserve and protect the rights of every individual if he pursues a career in civil rights.

Finally, I would like to comment on Garret's desire to pursue work in civil rights. I am sure that Garret could work in any area of law. He is hardworking, dedicated, and intellectual. Based on my conversations with him, I know that he is committed to civil rights and consumer protection work.

I am sincerely grateful for having had the opportunity to work with Garret over the course of his summer fellowship. If you have any additional questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Shontee Smothers', with a stylized, overlapping loop structure.

Shontee Smothers
Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center
Staff Attorney
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