

Dear Dan Ruben:

I spent this summer working for Bay Area Legal Aid's Richmond California office in the Public Benefits division. In addition to doing benefits work, I also participated in a weekly domestic violence clinic and wrote a reasonable accommodation letter on the behalf of a client who had been lawfully evicted but was severely disabled and therefore could not vacate her apartment in the specified time frame. The experience was eye opening and incredibly rewarding.

The highlight of the summer was drafting a prehearing brief on behalf of a client who had been overpaid in the amount of \$852 by the Social Security Administration. I argued that because she was not at fault in causing the overpayment and because the amount overpaid was less than \$1000, the debt should be repaid. As a person living in extreme poverty, she needed every penny of her monthly disability check. Throughout the entirety of drafting the brief, she was incredibly grateful and regularly let me know how much it meant to her that I was advocating on her behalf. She would have been forced to pay the overpayment if it had not been for Bay Legal and the work that I did.

Another great moment occurred at Bay Legal's Richmond restraining order clinic. I assisted a young woman who was incredibly intelligent, enrolled in college courses and was a case manager at a local non-profit. She began dating her ex-boyfriend while they were in high school and ended their relationship after seven years of severe physical and emotional abuse. She came into the clinic with a broken arm that he had caused and recounted the things that he had done to her to maintain power and control. She told me about the cameras that he installed in their bedroom used to monitor her when he was not around and she told me about how he acted when he drove with her in the car. He would scream, speed, threaten her life, beat her, and go the wrong way on one-way streets, all while driving. Being able to assist her with her restraining order was immensely rewarding. I felt like an integral part of this woman's future and without me (or someone like me) she may have been destined to a life of abuse.

Above all, this experience has taught me how to be empathetic. Coming from an upper middle class household I had not been exposed to the hardships that people who live in poverty face on a daily basis. I never thought that simply getting from one side of town to the other could be so difficult. But by the end of my internship my eyes had been completely opened. The world that we live in can be incredibly cruel, but it is because of Bay Legal, Equal Justice America, and people like myself that make it slightly more tolerable for people living in poverty.

From the bottom of my heart I thank you for making this experience available to me. You helped change my life as well as the lives of the clients that I was able to serve.

Thank you,

John Stiff
UC Davis



September 4, 2015

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, Virginia 23112

Re: John Stiff, Equal Justice America Summer 2015 Fellow

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Bay Area Legal Aid ("BayLegal") had the pleasure of having Mr. John Stiff as an Equal Justice Summer fellow with us this summer in our Contra Costa County Regional Office. We are happy to provide you with feedback on the wonderful work that Mr. Stiff was able to complete during her summer at BayLegal.

BayLegal is the largest staff based non-profit law firm providing free civil legal services to low-income individuals and families in the San Francisco Bay Area. We provide services on a regional basis through local offices and clinics located in the following Bay Area counties: Alameda (Oakland); Contra Costa (Richmond); Marin; Napa; San Francisco; San Mateo (Redwood City); and Santa Clara (San Jose) counties. Additionally, BayLegal has a regional Legal Advice Line which conducts intake and provides advice and counsel. With six regional offices, and 100+ staff members, BayLegal is uniquely positioned to help people across county lines. BayLegal assist clients in four main priority areas: (1) Domestic Violence Prevention; (2) Housing Preservation; (3) Economic Security; and (4) Health Access.

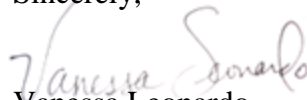
Contra Costa County is a large county with a lot of need. Mr. Stiff's background in case management was incredibly useful in his ability to create rapport with clients during times of crisis. Mr. Stiff assisted clients with legal matters related to their Social Security Disability benefits, housing, and domestic violence restraining orders. On a weekly basis he assisted in our Domestic Violence Temporary Restraining Order clinics. He also conducted important legal research and drafted legal briefs for individuals with pending Social Security Administration appeals.

We are happy that Mr. Stiff was able to obtain funding from Equal Justice America. Unfortunately, BayLegal does not have the funds to pay our summer law clerks and we highly encourage our clerks to apply for outside funding. It is because of fellowships like Equal Justice America that we are able to get wonderful interns like Mr. Stiff and provide

our clients with the services they desperately need. BayLegal thanks Equal Justice America donors for creating opportunities for law students like Mr. Stiff to serve clients in need.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vanessa Leonardo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vanessa Leonardo

Staff Attorney

Contra Costa County Regional Office

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