

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

31 August 2013

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My summer as an Equal Justice America Fellow, working with the Clinic for Legal Assistance to Servicemembers and Veterans was an incredibly rewarding experience. I am very grateful to EJA because without your generous support, I would not have been able to serve in this capacity.

The Clinic for Servicemembers and Veterans was a great place to spend my EJA Summer Fellowship. The Clinic practices heavily in family law and I had the opportunity to work on a number of family law matters. These cases were a new and exciting experience for me because they required getting directly involved in the lives of my clients. I became familiar not only with the legal challenges the client was facing, but I also became personally invested in their lives. This was challenging in that it required managing emotions and expectations in a way that I had never experienced before. Still, it was refreshing to see the direct impact that my work was having in the lives and futures of actual people. They were truly appreciative for the assistance that we were providing.

Perhaps my favorite case from this summer was working with a local homeless veteran. Having lived in the Arlington, VA area his entire life, this man served his country nobly in Vietnam. After falling on hard times and bouncing from job to job, he began living out of his car. While he had come to accept his new lifestyle, he was accustomed to using the public showers at the local high school pool. One day, the police arbitrarily started harassing him and eventually issued a ban forbidding him from entering the shower property. He contacted us and we worked all summer to restore his access to the pool. This was particularly challenging because the client had severe social anxiety and difficulties communicating with others. The client had burned a lot of bridges with police officers, local officials, and others because of his lack of social skills. The hardest part of representing this client was getting people to see past his rough exterior and to realize that he too was a person, deserving of understanding and respect. While the case was a struggle, it made the end result so much sweeter.

The project that I am most proud of from this summer was the Clinic's initiative to establish a Veterans Treatment Court in Northern Virginia. As the country begins to heal from over a decade of war, we must confront the reality that many of our veterans are suffering from combat-induced mental illness such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. A new movement, based on the popular drug treatment court model, proposes diverting veterans with treatable mental health conditions out of the traditional criminal justice system and into a program of judicially supervised treatment. These diversion courts are producing phenomenal results in hundreds of jurisdictions across the country by increasing public safety, saving taxpayer dollars, and giving our combat veterans the opportunities that they deserve. This summer, I

spent countless hours researching these courts and have begun working with community partners to explore the feasibility of establishing such a court in our Northern Virginia community. In addition to learning a great deal about diversion courts, combat related mental illness, and the politics inherent in state court administration, I'm also very excited about the strides we have made towards making this court a reality for our community.

This summer was a wonderful opportunity that I will never forget. I cannot express my gratitude to Equal Justice America enough. I will be forever thankful for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

J. Justin Collins
2013 EJA Summer Fellow
George Mason University School of Law
Anticipated Graduation: May 2014