

August 31, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

I have had the opportunity to walk among what Americans would deem the poorest nations. I have been overseas multiple times on mission trips, working in orphanages and camps, and practicing medicine in poor villages. However, it is easy to forget that impoverished people groups live right here in our own backyard. The idea that "the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer" came across my mind multiple times each day this summer.

For ten weeks, I had the privilege of working at the Virginia Legal Aid Society (VLAS). VLAS is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting economic and family stability and reducing poverty by providing effective legal assistance across Virginia.

My first month I represented a client whose children were denied medical coverage. After several weeks of researching the Medicaid Manual and laws associated with Medicaid, I was equipped to present my argument for the family. After several weeks of waiting for a response, my manager came into my office smiling and handed me a letter. Inside I read that we had successfully represented the family, and the children would receive the medical coverage they needed. Words cannot express how rewarding it was to call my client and share the good news. While I most likely will never understand what he went through, the sound of a thankful and satisfied client is indescribable.

While part of my responsibilities included the typical duties of an attorney — client interviews, research and writing memos, the hearing, etc.—my manager also required that I participate in “poverty projects.” These projects forced me to live out a day in the life of a typical Legal Aid client. These projects included taking city transportation or catching a ride with friends

because my car “broke down,” going to the Laundromat, living on a single person’s monthly social security check, living a few days without electricity, and calling local churches asking for assistance with electric bills.

Oftentimes, I need tangible reminders of how much I have that others do not. Relying on others to provide transportation, using the public Laundromat, and living on a budget that included excessive medical bills, was a great reminder of what I have. And yes, while I currently manage on less than a monthly social security check, I am blessed not to have excessive medical bills, which Medicaid cannot cover entirely.

The primary reason I wanted to work at VLAS this summer was to gain perspective on how laws affect real people. Last summer I worked in Washington, D.C. helping to create and promote legislation. This summer I worked with people affected by legislation. It was a great opportunity to see both sides and better understand how to help those in need. I have learned, not just here, but over the past several years, that you cannot truly understand someone until you have lived with them. While I may never have to live in the same shoes as my VLAS clients, at least sitting across from them or researching issues for them gives me a window to their world. I realize I will never completely understand their life, but spending the summer at VLAS has brought me at least one step closer.

Sincerely,
Karlee A. N. Shelton
Liberty University School of Law
Class of 2012

MEMO

TO: Equal Justice America

FROM: Jeremy P. White, Esq.
Managing Attorney, VLAS, Inc.

RE: Ms. Karlee Shelton
Summer Intern 2011

DATE: August 31, 2011

I had the opportunity to work with and supervise Ms. Shelton in our office during the summer. Her work was very thorough, well-researched and of the highest quality on behalf of our clients.

Her initial project was a Medicaid case for a family in the U.S. The family had triplets and the family made application for Medicaid coverage for the children. The father, a Korean student in the U.S., wrote a letter attempting to express his intent to remain in Virginia to satisfy the residency requirements of the parent of a minor applicant for Medicaid. Ms. Shelton conducted the interview, gathered the facts, researched the law and handled the administrative hearing. At the hearing, Ms. Shelton conducted direct examination of our client, cross-examination of the representative from the Department of Social Services and legal argument. The hearing officer ultimately remanded the case back to the local Department of Social Services who made a favorable determination that the triplets were eligible for Medicaid at the time of their birth.

Ms. Shelton had numerous interactions with clients in fact gathering and at different stages of the representation. She consistently conducted herself professionally and with genuine concern for the clients. Ms. Shelton successfully found a car salesman who had shut down his business several years before. This enabled our office to work toward resolution for our client, who could not find the salesman previously. Ms. Shelton's work made a significant impact for our clients and enabled us to serve more clients than we otherwise would have been able to serve.