

August 31, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would like to start out by expressing my sincere gratitude for the Equal Justice America fellowship I received this summer. With the stipend, I was able to spend my summer working for the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society and it was, without a doubt, the best internship experience I could have had. I worked with amazing attorneys, handled fascinating cases, and met clients who truly needed our services. The experience completely reaffirmed my commitment to public service law.

As an intern at CVLAS this summer, I think I probably gained more real-world knowledge about the practice of the law than I ever will in law school. I got to represent clients before the Virginia Employment Commission, observe courtroom proceedings and client meetings, and write briefs and memos for all kinds of different cases.

The summer was enlightening and rewarding in a lot of ways. For instance, one of the first clients I encountered was a woman who was about to lose her home and be sued for rent she didn't owe. At the trial, the judge read a bench memo, listened to a great oral argument from my supervising attorney, and ultimately ruled in favor of our client. And I wrote that bench memo. It was a really amazing feeling to know I had done something to help someone who really needed and deserved it.

On the other hand though, my introduction to the realities of our justice system was eye-opening in some pretty disappointing ways. The Executive Director of CVLAS once said to me that "the law doesn't always provide justice," and even though I think I knew that on some level, it was much harder to see in action. It was infuriating to see public benefits agencies deny or withdraw help from people who really needed it, even though the whole point of public benefits programs is to help people who really need it. It was discouraging to see landlords treat their tenants as nuisances or liabilities, rather than people. It was heartbreaking when a client's situation was so bad that the best result in a case was a protective order or a divorce.

For me, the hardest thing about all of the difficult cases that I saw come through our office this summer was how the deck always seems to be stacked against our clients. In June, all of the interns had the chance to listen to speech from Larry Harley, the 2011 Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year. He pointed out that one of the most frustrating things about our society is that "we expect everyone to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, but then we turn around and take away their boots." But he said something else as well—that he is a legal aid lawyer on purpose. And that really resonated with me, because after 11 weeks at CVLAS I came to see how crucial free legal services are for people who have no other options. I can't imagine where CVLAS clients would be if the amazing lawyers and staff I worked with this summer weren't there to make sure that those clients don't fall through the cracks.

Now that my internship has come to a close, I've done a lot of reflecting; about the cases I helped with this summer, about the ups and downs of our justice system, and about the type of lawyer I want to be one day. The whole experience was challenging, educational, and ultimately, really, really wonderful. I'm so glad that I had the chance to spend a summer working with people who are legal aid lawyers on purpose. Once again, I am truly grateful to Equal Justice America for making it possible.

Sincerely,

Kati Kitts  
University of Richmond

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August 22, 2011

Dan Ruben, Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road - Building II, Suite 201  
Midlothian, VA. 23112

Re: Kati Kitts – 2011 internship at Central Virginia Legal Aid Society

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My 2011 summer intern, Kati Kitts, has asked me to write a short letter evaluating her performance. In a word – exemplary.

Ms. Kitts was my summer intern from May 23 through August 5, 2011. She handled seven major projects for me in the areas of unemployment compensation and housing law, and represented three unemployment compensation claimants at Appeals Examiner hearings before the Virginia Employment Commission (with me sitting at her side passing her an occasional written note). Her preparation for these hearings was thorough, and she prepared detailed questions for direct and cross examination, prepared legal closing argument, and prepped her client for the hearing.

Among her major projects was an unemployment compensation Opening Brief and Reply Brief to the Court of Appeals of Virginia in which her research and writing were so excellent that only minimal editing (changing an occasional word or comma) was needed. She accomplished a similar task with a Motion & Memorandum in Support of Petitioner in another unemployment case before the City of Richmond Circuit Court. She also wrote a Bench Memo in an eviction case in the City of Richmond General District Court which was essential in correctly persuading the judge as to the burden of proof not resting with our client. Her enthusiasm and passion for helping our clients, and her dedication to the hard work of doing so, were top quality.

Sincerely,

Martin Wegbreit (Direct – 804-200-6045)  
Director of Litigation