

August 29, 2010

Dan Ruben

Executive Director

Equal Justice America

Building II – Suite 204

13540 East Boundary Road

Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to complete an Equal Justice America Fellowship this summer and to provide a brief summary of the nature of my work, and the positive impact that I was able to make in the lives of several D.C. residents. My fellowship was with the Housing & Consumer Law Clinic at the University of the District of Columbia, David A. Clarke School of Law. As a specially-licensed student attorney, I was tasked with providing legal representation to indigent D.C. residents, many of whom were living with substandard housing conditions and/or facing eviction. My experience was immensely rewarding, and it has given me the opportunity to develop many of the skills that I will need as a legal practitioner.

Going into this summer, one of my goals was to refine my oral advocacy skills, and representing clients this summer gave me sufficient opportunity to do just that. Some of my case assignments required me to argue motions in open court, but more often I was using my verbal persuasion skills to entice opposing attorneys or parties to understand and accept my client's position, and ultimately to settle the case on terms that were favorable to my client. In one case assignment, I represented a destitute Army veteran who desperately wanted to leave the squalid conditions in which he was living. The man's landlord absolutely refused to settle the matter. However, little by little, I convinced the landlord's attorney of the validity of our legal position. Over time, he came to see that it was in his client's best interest to settle the matter rather than engage in a protracted legal fight that his client would likely lose. As a consequence, I was able to secure an adequate amount of funds for my client's moving expenses and several months' rent in a new apartment. My greatest accomplishments this summer were cases such as this, where my advocacy efforts paid off by producing positive results in a timely manner.

Another facet of my summer fellowship that I found to be very rewarding was learning and practicing new areas of housing law. Coming into my fellowship, I had some experience working

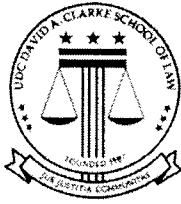
in the Housing & Consumer Law Clinic during the spring semester, and I was hopeful that I would have the opportunity to learn some new things over the summer. I was able to do this in two ways: First, the clinic experienced an influx of “Section 8” clients this summer; these are individuals who rely on federal subsidies to pay some or all of their housing expenses. Serving these clients gave me the opportunity to become familiar with the local and federal statutes and regulations that govern the operation of federal housing assistance programs. This knowledge allowed me to successfully negotiate with the District of Columbia Housing Authority to increase the amount of housing subsidy payment received by one of my clients, a partially disabled veteran, who is struggling to survive as a part-time taxi driver.

A second way that I increased my base of knowledge was attending events that were put on by local courts for the purpose of informing and training landlord/tenant attorneys in the area. One of these events was an introduction to a new docket in D.C. Superior Court called the Housing Conditions Court. This court was recently created for tenants who are suing their landlords strictly to have repairs made in a timely fashion. It was an informative afternoon program, led by a personable trial judge. I found it very interesting to hear the myriad questions posed by the seasoned attorneys in attendance; their knowledge of the procedural rules and intricacies of civil practice was impressive, and their easy perception of the potential consequences this new court would have on their clients was fascinating. The program was immensely helpful to me; I learned about the new Housing Conditions Court, about lawyering in general, and I was able to better understand the some of the procedural quirks that can arise when the courts decide to change their rules.

My third year of law school has arrived and I am moving on. I am grateful for the opportunity afforded me by Equal Justice America. While I feel that I personally obtained invaluable knowledge and skill this summer, my biggest success was making a tangible difference in the lives of several D.C. residents.

Sincerely,

Marshall D. Chriswell  
University of the District of Columbia  
David A. Clarke School of Law



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August 4, 2010

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing with an enthusiastic evaluation of Marshall Chriswell's work during his fellowship this summer. Mr. Chriswell was an Equal Justice America fellow in the Housing and Consumer Law Clinic at the University of the District of Columbia, David A. Clarke School of Law.

Mr. Chriswell was tasked with the direct legal representation of several low-income D.C. residents in landlord-tenant litigation, often for the purpose of forcing the repair of substandard housing conditions, and ultimately with the goal of maintaining the availability of safe and affordable rental housing. Mr. Chriswell represented approximately eleven clients. His clients included an Army veteran with little income, a disabled man about to lose his home, two low-income non-English-speaking families whose children's bodies were covered with bedbug welts, and a low-income single mother entering college and about to send her only child to college. Each was faced with living conditions from unbearable to uninhabitable, and in each case, Mr. Chriswell obtained favorable court orders or settlement agreements that either forced desperately-needed repairs or obtained enough money for his client to secure new, safe, and sanitary housing.

During his fellowship, Mr. Chriswell had the opportunity to experience many aspects of civil litigation. He counseled clients, drafted and filed pleadings, argued motions hearings, negotiated with opposing parties, and drafted settlement agreements. Each aspect of his work involved factual investigation, legal research and analysis, and problem-solving.

Mr. Chriswell is a natural lawyer who was also a pleasure to work with. He was always highly motivated and proactive in his work, and worked well with colleagues, his supervisors, and with his clients. He exhibited appropriate confidence, which corresponded with good oral advocacy skills, along with the ability to be calm under

pressure. His work was high quality, including his research and analysis skills. Mr. Chriswell also sought out and was receptive to feedback. As shown above, Mr. Chriswell was able to successfully resolve each of his client's cases this summer, which may not have happened without his ability to perform his work both quickly and effectively.

In sum, Mr. Chriswell was a highly effective advocate on behalf of his clients, who was able to make a significant change in his clients' lives. I am pleased and grateful that Mr. Chriswell was able to work with the Housing and Consumer Law Clinic this summer thanks to a fellowship from Equal Justice America.

Sincerely,



Alysia Robben