

August 30, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank you for accepting me into the Equal Justice America Fellowship for the summer of 2016. I was blessed to work with Juvenile Law Center on important juvenile justice matters. My experience with Juvenile Law Center was eye opening, impactful, and has led to me securing a position next summer with Community Legal Services to work on their Youth Justice Project.

While at Juvenile Law Center, I conducted research and wrote a memo on the unconstitutionality of sentencing juvenile defendants to jail time for not being able to afford their court fines and fees. These are instances where otherwise the young people would be placed on probation or put into a diversion program. In the adult system, this prison pipeline has been held unconstitutional in seminal cases like, *Williams v. Illinois*, *Tate v. Short* and *Bearden v. Georgia*. Safeguards have been set into place to protect against this unconstitutional judicial decision-making. For instance, judges are to hold indigency hearings to determine the defendant's ability to pay. They are also supposed to consider alternatives to jail time such as community service, payment plans, and reduced costs. My argument, was that, we know that in the adult system it is unconstitutional to jail defendants for being poor and there have been safeguards set in place to protect against this, however, we also know that psychological research regarding children's development used in important Supreme Court litigation won by Juvenile Law Center (see *Roper*, *Graham*, *Miller* and *Montgomery*) has proven that children are different and deserve greater protection. For this very reason, Juvenile Law Center has helped pass Rule 151 in Pennsylvania, which presumes that juveniles are indigent and have a right to counsel. This is a progressive step in the right direction and the rest of the nation should follow suit.

Another juvenile justice assignment I had the pleasure of working on looked at the weakened Fourth Amendment rights of students once they enter the public school setting. We know that school administrators are allowed to search and seize a student's person and property without a warrant and probable cause. Instead, they are afforded a lower burden of proof, which is reasonable suspicion in order to maintain school discipline and safety. We also know that School Resource Officers who serve a police-like function work in schools in an official capacity. Since then, student conduct that used to be handled through official school disciplinary procedures are now being reported as criminal, thus funneling students into the school-to-prison pipeline.

I was also able to do some work on the child advocacy side of Juvenile Law Center's mission and work by looking at the issue of free exercise of religion for children and families in the child welfare system. There were are a lot of different dynamics to

consider such as the child's rights to practice their religion independent of their biological parents or foster parents beliefs, the biological parents and foster care parents rights in relation to one another, and more. In the end, my supervisor was pleased with my research and the drafted arguments I was able to compile.

These are just some of the many high quality assignments I had the honor to work on. I want to thank you again for affording me the ability to take advantage of this summer and use it to figure out what I want to do in the law profession. I loved my time at Juvenile Law Center and it has confirmed for me that public interest work is what I want to do with my law career. I am excited to continue exploring my interest in juvenile justice and child advocacy next summer.

Best,
Tracie Johnson
Temple James E. Beasley School of Law, 2018

Aug. 29, 2016

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Midlothian, VA 23112

Via Email to KATIE@EQUALJUSTICEAMERICA.ORG

Re: Tracie Johnson Summer 2016 EJA Fellowship at Juvenile Law Center

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Tracie Johnson was a terrific summer law clerk at Juvenile Law Center, where she worked to advance the rights of young people in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Juvenile Law Center plays a leadership role nationally and in Pennsylvania in shaping and using the law on behalf of children in the child welfare and justice systems to promote fairness, prevent harm, secure access to appropriate services, and ensure a smooth transition from adolescence to adulthood. Most of the youth on whose behalf we work are between 10 and 21 years of age and are among society's most vulnerable—most likely to be mislabeled, ignored, harmed, or scarred for life by systems that are supposed to help them. We work to protect and advance children's rights in courts, legislatures, and executive agencies. Our strategies include litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, and strategic communications. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values.

Student interns are supervised by one staff attorney but receive assignments from all the attorneys in the office. Tracie carried out a variety of policy research and writing assignments to improve outcomes for older youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Her work product varied from traditional legal memos to a post for the Juvenile Law Center blog. Some of the substantive topics Tracie worked on include confidentiality of juvenile court records and court proceedings, law and policy around property searches conducted in schools, juvenile life without parole, and the right of foster children to practice their own religion.

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Tracie received glowing feedback from Juvenile Law Center attorneys on her work product. They praised her for going “above and beyond,” and conducting deep, thorough research while still identifying patterns and never forgetting the big picture. Tracie also excelled at communicating with the assigning attorney while she worked on new tasks—several attorneys commended her for asking the right questions at the right time to ensure she efficiently produced the desired work. In addition, Tracie’s memos were concise and well-organized.

It was delightful to work with Tracie. Her positive attitude was contagious and she established a great rapport with all staff. Tracie also demonstrated her genuine interest in the field by continually asking for outside reading recommendations, and engaging staff in conversations about the connections between the work and other personal and policy experiences.

Juvenile Law Center’s summer interns are invited to participate in three types of programming: in-house “coffee talks” with staff that cover professional backgrounds and substantive topics, city-wide brown bag lunches for all public interest law interns, and outside “field trips” to correctional facilities, court, etc. Tracie was an active participant in all programming and asked thoughtful questions that evidenced a deep understanding of the implications of various policies and the structural societal factors underlying them.

We were so pleased to work with Tracie this summer to create opportunities and break down barriers to success for vulnerable young people in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Although we will miss her, we are thrilled such a warm, talented, and dedicated advocate has chosen to work in child and criminal justice advocacy and look forward to following her career.

Sincerely,

Katherine Burdick
Staff Attorney