

August 31, 2011

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Building II – Suite 104
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My summer as a Fellow at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau was incredible. Though I worked a lot, I loved the work and looked forward to every day. I knew before that I wanted to work in legal services, and this experience only confirmed that.

I served as the primary case-handler on mostly family law cases, with a sprinkling of social security and wage/hour cases, and I gained a wide range of experience at all stages of litigation. Two of the most notable aspects of my externship were gaining experience in court and working on two appeals. Public speaking of any kind has always been a source of panic for me. Though seasoned attorneys always say that the nervousness about speaking in court subsides with experience, at the beginning of the summer, I could not imagine that the feeling of panic could ever be dispelled and thought I would just learn to hide it better. As it turns out, they were right. My first argument was for a social security case in the U.S. District Court. I was so nervous and intimidated about arguing in federal court against the very experienced U.S. Attorney, but ultimately I was able to calm my nerves to deliver a compelling argument and respond clearly to the judge's questions. It gave me confidence for future arguments. In my last argument in the Probate and Family Court, which was the toughest of the summer, I was nervous but actually felt my nervousness was a positive force, and I did not feel the utter panic I have always felt in the past.

Though working on the appeals harkened somewhat unpleasant memories of legal writing in 1L year, the two appeals I had were incredibly valuable experiences. In the first, our client was the appellant in an unemployment matter. Though I did not write the brief for that case, I was responsible for all of the appellate procedure leading up to the brief-writing point: requesting tapes and transcripts, designating parts of the record for the Appendix, entering the appeal, and drafting and filing preliminary motions. Reading and following the Rules of Appellate Procedure was a useful practical experience. In the second appeal, we represented the Appellee in a divorce judgment. This was my biggest case of the summer because I wrote the brief and also researched and prepared several motions relating to both procedural and substantive issues in the case.

Legal services work reflects a nexus of law, advocacy, and even social work, and I enjoyed wearing these different hats. Clients are what make legal services work both incredibly fulfilling, and also quite draining at times. Clients are draining on many levels: some pull at your heart strings and you care so much that it drains you; some are terrible and scream in your face, which drains your emotions and patience; and some are just so demanding or needy that answering to them is mentally and emotionally draining. The nature of the system itself can also be draining. Representing underprivileged clients in various systems that often seem to work against them or provide them no relief can become frustrating and disheartening. On the other side of the coin, advocating for clients with whom you fundamentally disagree or have your own concerns can also be difficult. This summer, my cases brought out a wide range of issues concerning clients and advocacy. Though direct client service work sometimes feels like a fight, it is the fight that kept me going and motivates me to continue in legal services.

In my fellowship, I certainly gained a great deal of substantive legal experience, but almost more importantly, I learned a great deal about myself – my personal strengths and weaknesses, the scope of my heart and limits of my patience. The experience gave me confidence by showing me that I was capable of the work, but also humbled me by never letting me forget that there are so many bigger things than myself.

Thanks very much for supporting my incredible summer.

Sincerely,

Amy Anthony
American University