

September 1, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer Equal Justice America allowed me to advocate for housing justice as a fellow at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. I worked about fourteen weeks this summer and worked on thirteen cases as the primary case handler. My fellowship allowed me to interact directly with clients, opposing parties, witnesses, and government agencies, engage in extensive factual and legal investigation, draft motions, research legal issues, conduct discovery, and appear and argue in court. I was certified under Massachusetts Supreme Court Rule 3:03 as a student practitioner and therefore able to appear before judges.

I was supervised by some outstanding clinical instructors, practicing attorneys with years of trial and supervision experience, whose guidance developed my abilities as an advocate. As a fellow in the housing law practice, I represented individual clients who were being evicted from public, subsidized, and private housing. I also worked with tenant associations and progressive community organization City Life / Vida Urbana to ensure the availability of affordable housing in the Greater Boston area. In addition, to my regular case load I also, through Massachusetts law, offered limited representation to families who I met at City Life or at housing court. Through the "attorney of the day" program at Boston Housing Court, I often picked up cases where I assisted families in mediation, negotiations with the opposing counsel, as well as argue motions. As a Rule 3:03 student I also argued motions for other law students, mostly related to foreclosure law.

One of the most interesting was a case that involved representing a tenant's association. This was a true test of movement lawyering, which is the kind of lawyer that I aspire to be. It was a challenge to learn how to juggle all the different interested parties involved. Fortunately, right in my last week at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau we were able to enter favorable agreements for all the tenants. Each tenant was facing a summary process eviction case as well as a separate civil suit that alleged breach of contract. Because of the successful negotiations this summer all suits were dismissed for each tenant. A compelling moment was writing and submitting a motion known as a strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) against the opposing counsel. An unconventional and uncommon motion that is designed to protect the liberty and free speech interests of parties. We filed this on behalf of the tenant association to protect their very right to organize and demand collective bargaining as a union.

I was able to really dig in deep and handle case work this summer and challenged myself to a new level. Dispute, the many long hours and even the tedious elements of work such as discovery this summer confirmed that this is really what I want to do. I came to law school to become a more effective advocate for others - specifically in the field of housing justice. Equal Justice America allows law students like myself to gain practice and even emotional skills. Without this fellowship I would not have been able to do the vital work that I did this summer.

More importantly because of this fellowship I was able to advocate and keep around ten different families from homelessness.

Sincerely,

Amy M. Willis
Suffolk Law
Candidate for Juris Doctor, 2015