

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This past summer I worked for Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA). PLA helps to provide legal aid to indigent clients within the city of Philadelphia. I worked as an advocate in their Custody and Support Clinic. As an advocate, I worked to help clients with their family law needs---child support, child custody, domestic abuse, and divorce. Many of my clients came for help with one or multiple of these family law issues and some of my clients need help with all of these issues.

During the course of the summer I worked with 70 clients that came to PLA before I started. I took on these clients' cases from other law students that worked at the clinic during the school year. I became familiar with their cases and helped these clients with their on going needs. Since family law matters such as child custody can take months, even years to resolve, clients often require assistance for a significant length of time. In addition to these past clients, I would get 2-3 new clients that would come to the office daily. With these clients, I would conduct an intake interview to get background information and get an understanding of how best to assist the clients with their needs. After conducting intake, I would advise the clients on their case and help them through the legal process. I would often prepare petitions on my clients' behalf, which they would file with the court. I would also advise my clients with how to best represent themselves in court and make their case before the judge. Additionally, in more severe cases, I helped my clients obtain attorneys to represent their case, either through PLA or an outside organization.

One of my clients was a young woman in her early twenties. She came to PLA because she wanted help getting custody rights for her baby. Since there was no current custody order the father of the child and my client had equal rights to the child. That means that if the father decides to take the baby without notice or my client's approval, under the law he has every right to do so. This is extremely difficult situation because the one parent can take the child anywhere they want and the other parent does not have any say legally. The other parent could potentially not see the child and lose their rights. Through the course of the intake I found out that my client's relationship with the child's father was very volatile. He started abusing my client a few months after the beginning of their relationship. The abuse continued while my client was pregnant and after she gave birth. There was an instance when my client and the child's father were arguing and he pushed the client on top of the lying baby in bed. Luckily, she was able to move away before she fell on top of the baby. The client wanted to leave the relationship after the abuse started but she felt compelled to stay because she wanted to maintain a family for her child's sake. However, after the abuse escalated and the child was placed in danger the client had

the strength to leave her child's father. However, the client was still afraid for her safety. I told my client about the process of obtaining a protection from abuse order. However, the client replied that a piece of paper could not protect her since she already called the police multiple times. I could empathize with her situation and I understand how helpless she felt. I put her in touch with services offered to women suffering from domestic violence. I also helped her file a petition to obtain primary custody of the child. Unfortunately, this client's story was only one of the many similar ones that I worked on this past summer.

PLA services are crucial for the Philadelphia community. The clients that obtain assistance cannot afford representation and often they are the most vulnerable individuals in society. These clients come to PLA at the most difficult time in their life. I was able to provide these clients with some hope and help them get the resolution they desire. My clients were very grateful for the work I did on their case and helping them was a rewarding experience for me. Through working with PLA, I realized as future lawyers we can make a difference in individuals lives. I sincerely enjoyed my work at PLA and hope to continue to work in public interest law in the future.

I would like to thank you for giving me the financial support needed to make my summer internship a success. With an Equal Justice America Fellowship I would not have been able to have this amazing experience working with PLA.

Sincerely,

Arupa Barua
Rutgers Camden School of Law