

August 15 2016

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 express my gratitude to Equal Justice America for allowing me to gain valuable experience in public interest law. During this summer, I worked in the CORI & Re-entry project at Greater Boston Legal Services. I have met with many clients with criminal records and helped them seal their records. With their records sealed, the clients are now able to seek employment and housing and transition into their communities.

I have never met so many people with criminal records before this fellowship experience. With no prior interactions, I had biases against them and often looked away from problems that they are facing. This summer, I have met with many people with criminal records. It did not take me long to realize that it is vitally important to seal their criminal records so that they can be integrated into society.

In particular, I remember one client who I helped to seal her records. She is a 46-year-old single mother with five children. She and her family were homeless for three years, since her criminal charges, moving one place to another until they found their place in a shelter. But when she called us for help, her time at the shelter was about to expire within 6 months. As a single mother, she had to find a place to live for her family but she was repeatedly refused by landlords because of her criminal records. She did not commit any crimes for many years, but it was still preventing her from finding a place to live.

Her criminal records were also a barrier to employment. Since her charges, she was not able to get a job despite her hard and diligent effort. She wanted to work in a nursing home because she had previously worked in nursing homes before the charges and she greatly enjoyed helping the elderly people. But since the charges, she was continuously rejected from nursing home positions that she applied for.

After listening to her story, I realized that this is the very reason for recidivism, and that our legal system has to do something to help them reintegrate into society. If people who committed crimes in the past are not able to get a job and find a place to live, they have no choice but to stay out in the street and commit more crimes. One mistake in the past should not ruin one's life and forever confine her to poverty and misery.

I took her information to our office and requested for her CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) from the DCJIS (Department of Criminal Justice Information Service). After checking to see whether she is eligible to seal her records, I interviewed the client and wrote an affidavit, explaining why her CORI is so onerous a burden that it has to be sealed. I went to the court that has the jurisdiction over her, and scheduled a hearing. As the hearing date approached, I called her several times to remind her of what she is expected to say if a judge ask her a question.

On the hearing date, I went to the court with one of the attorneys from the CORI & Re-entry Project. The attorney and I went over everything once again before the hearing. Since I am not 3:03 certified, I could not represent her in the hearing but only able to watch her during the hearing.

After the hearing, which ended favorably, she looked so happy. She can now restart her life without criminal records to hold her back. People will not look at her as a dangerous person and see her as who she is now. People will judge her from her content, rather than her records.

Because of this fellowship experience, I was able to gain a new perspective at one of the most marginalized populations in our society. Seeing new problems in society and understanding the situation of the people with criminal records, I now have a new plan for my career. I truly respect attorneys who spent decades of their life in public interest law, helping the people in need, and I wish to follow their path in the future.

Sincerely,

Hyun Y. Yoon

Hyun Young Yoon
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Class of 2018