

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Before I began my internship this summer, I had very little understanding about housing law or legal services in general. During my time working at the housing unit at Greater Boston Legal Services, I have come to appreciate the value legal services provides to thousands of underprivileged clients throughout the city. On my second day on the job, I attended my first community organizing meeting with City Life/Vida Urbana, who GBLS works with closely under the “sword and shield” model of equal justice and community organizing. These meetings, twice a week on Tuesday and Wednesday became a regular facet of my experience over the summer. Starting at these meetings, I worked closely with clients cultivating relationships from the beginning of their cases to the end. It is one thing to read about issues such as gentrification, displacement, and eviction epidemics in books or articles, but one does not truly understand these issues until one looks someone in the eyes who is experiencing one of these things for themselves. Early on in the process I worked with two elderly sisters, both Chinese immigrants who were forced out of their homes by a landlord who sought to make them leave by means of intimidation rather than the proper legal channels. Getting to know these sisters and their story made working on their case different for me. Every task I worked on preparing for trial, I knew exactly who I was working to assist and why I was doing it. This clarity provided me with a better ability to dedicate myself to the work at hand.

The other major case my unit worked on over the summer involved dozens of highly-vulnerable tenants, mostly formerly homeless, many disabled in one form or another, and nearly all relying on Section 8 vouchers for their housing facing uncertainty in the future of their housing due to the landlord’s bankruptcy. Many of these individuals came in from community organization meetings, all

relaying separate complaints about what was going on in their apartments and buildings. Serious conditions issues, many having existed for years, were being simply ignored. Tenants who repeatedly complained about these issues found their utilities turned off, despite having paid their bills and seeing that the meters were still running, or worse were handed notices to quit. These tenants were rightly anxious about what might become of their tenancies through the landlord's bankruptcy proceedings, which he had kept hidden from them for years. In this case, the other interns and I cultivated relationships with as many of these tenants as possible. Canvassing the apartments to check for conditions problems, giving updates on what has happening in the bankruptcy proceedings. I would be lying if I said that everyone was easy to work with all the time, but if nothing else, such challenges remind one that at the heart of the legal profession is a relationship between attorney and client and just how important it is to cultivate trust.

This group of individuals had come to us as just that—a number of people with at first glance seemingly unrelated problems, but the longer we worked with them and got to understand what was going on came to see the larger picture of how their problems were related and how their tenancies and lives overlapped with each other's and my own. It was a privilege working with so many incredible people over the course of this summer and one of the best experiences I could have wanted. Working in this environment allowed me to greatly improve my legal knowledge, practical experience, but perhaps most importantly, come to a greater appreciation for the ties that bind us all together.

Thank you for the generous assistance you and your organization provided to me over the summer that allowed me to do this work.

Sincerely,

Joshua Richards
Boston University School of Law
Class of 2018