

August 31, 2017

Attn: Dan Ruben

Via Email: [Katie@equaljusticeamerica.org](mailto:Katie@equaljusticeamerica.org)

**Re: Equal Justice America fellow Elizabeth Ildfonso**

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I interned at Brooklyn Legal Services (BLS) in the Family Law and Domestic Violence Unit, part of Legal Services of New York City. BLS provides a broad range of legal advocacy and information for low-income people in Brooklyn. The Family Law Unit provides advice, counsel and legal representation to primarily victims of domestic violence in family, matrimonial and immigration law proceedings.

I served clients either by being in contact with them via phone or writing and researching legal memoranda on issues that staff attorneys were working on for their cases. My direct client contact consisted of taking down information during their initial intake. Often, clients were not English speaking and I would use a translator service to communicate with them. Since I am not an attorney, I would make it clear that I am not able to give them legal advice and of course could not guarantee representation. What makes BLS so unique is that attorneys will often give advice to clients and follow up even if they were not going to represent them in their case.

The intake process consisted of asking general contact information, financial information and questions specific to the issue(s) they are calling about. Questions directed towards issue-specific calls varied between divorce, custody, child/spousal support, visitation etc. Often clients called with a multitude of legal needs and would feel limited in their ability to address such issues on their own. Callers were survivors of domestic violence, which made the conversations even more sensitive. I found that sometimes simply listening to clients would serve as very helpful. Many clients feel as if they don't have a voice and very little options for addressing them. In the office, the intake process would involve discussing background information to discuss with the supervising attorney assigned to the client from the LSNY hotline. Soon into my time at the internship, my supervisor entrusted me with the task of relaying legal advice to callers. Although BLS does not (and cannot) represent most callers, I was impressed with the office's diligence of following up with clients.

Another, more indirect way that I served clients was through researching and writing legal memoranda. Some projects included research for non-biological non-adoptive standing for visitation on behalf of a lesbian parent, court considered equitable distribution factors, and distribution of marital and separate property. This work entailed little to no client contact, but still felt like work contributing to the unit and the clients it served. During unit meetings, we would discuss cases we were working on and it was satisfying to hear of the cases that were related to my research and hear about the progress of the case.

This summer was my first experience in the legal and non-profit field that I appreciate greatly. It was satisfying to do work that seemed so abstract in school in a classroom. I was excited to bring my skills from law school into this job and now I look forward to bringing what I learned from this internship with me onto the rest of my law school and working career.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Idefonso  
Brooklyn Law School '19

Brooklyn  
Legal  
Services

Legal  
Services NYC

August 28, 2017

Attn: Dan Ruben

Via Email: [Katie@equaljusticeamerica.org](mailto:Katie@equaljusticeamerica.org)

**Re: Equal Justice America fellow Elizabeth Ildefonso**

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am the Director of the Family Law and Domestic Violence Unit (FLU) at Brooklyn Legal Services (BLS), part of Legal Services of New York City. BLS seeks equal justice for low-income people in Brooklyn by providing a broad range of legal advocacy and information, helping empower poor people to identify and defeat the causes and effects of poverty in their communities. The FLU provides advice, counsel and legal representation to primarily victims of domestic violence in family, matrimonial and immigration law proceedings. We also engage in a wide range of advocacy on behalf of our clients and have established strong ties with the community based groups serving our clients.

Elizabeth Ildefonso interned with us from to June 14, 2017 to August 24, 2017. Elizabeth was an excellent intern in every respect. At all times, she was professional and courteous with clients and staff as well as fellow interns and volunteers. Elizabeth presented as eager to work and to learn, and was very diligent in asking for new assignments and which tasks took priority over others. She also presented as intellectually curious about the work we do, the clients we serve, and our organization's mission and goals. Elizabeth often asked thoughtful questions about individual clients, cases or court appearances that demonstrated she was interested and engaged.

Elizabeth engaged in a variety of activities, including legal research and drafting memoranda, assisting attorneys with trial preparation, court observation and note-taking, and documents review and drafting. In these tasks, Elizabeth's work was very thorough and she was receptive to comments and feedback. All of the attorneys who asked for her assistance were impressed with the result. Elizabeth was also tasked with conducting intake with clients, primarily over the phone, which included information gathering, determining eligibility for our services and conflict checks. Our clients often come to us in crisis and they often face significant barriers to equal justice, such as mental health issues or limited-to-no English proficiency. Elizabeth was excellent with clients, and spoke to them in a patient and

**Brooklyn Legal Services**  
105 Court Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201  
Phone: 718-237-5500 Fax: 718-855-0733  
<http://www.legalservicesnyc.org>

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empathetic but professional manner. She was always clear with clients about her role as an intern and what information or advice she could and could not provide. Within a very short period of time I was comfortable having Elizabeth provide simple advice and referrals to clients under my supervision, secure in the belief that she would convey information thoroughly and in a manner the clients could understand.

I very much enjoyed having Elizabeth as an intern and have already extended her an invitation to return as an intern as her schedule permits. Please feel free to contact me at 718-246-3261 or [adiamanti@lsnyc.org](mailto:adiamanti@lsnyc.org) for more information.

Regards,

Anna Maria Diamanti, Esq.  
Director, Family Law and Domestic Violence Unit