

August 15, 2016

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13450 E. Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to extend my sincerest thanks for the support your organization has granted me in the form of an Equal Justice America Fellowship. This summer, I was an intern at Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund Headquarters in New York. The experience was invaluable for me, and it would not have been possible without the generous support of Equal Justice America. As you may know, Lambda Legal is an impact litigation, advocacy, and education organization dedicated to advancing the civil rights of LGBT people and individuals living with HIV. My work this summer took numerous paths through LGBT/HIV law and I was able to work with several attorneys on a variety of legal research and writing assignments.

One of the most salient issues for LGBT rights advocates in the post-*Obergefell* legal landscape is the push for the civil rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people. As the targets of discriminatory laws, animus, and violence, transgender people are among the most politically and legally vulnerable populations in the nation. Many are critically underserved and face housing and hiring discrimination, a lack of access to healthcare, and homelessness at alarming rates. The attorneys and legal assistants who staff the Transgender Rights Project at Lambda Legal work tirelessly to address these issues and close the gap for trans people. One of my assignments involved identifying and contacting potential plaintiffs who had been adversely affected by a particular state policy. Listening to each of their stories, I was able to successfully conduct a plaintiff search and contribute to what will likely become a meaningful case for transgender rights. Every caller had a different background, but I was struck by the trait they all had in common: the resilience of spirit to live their lives with dignity and pride in the face of ignorance, prejudice, and violence.

Another stand-out experience was conducting research on the scope of legal protections for people who associate with HIV-positive populations. HIV+ individuals are legally protected under many federal and state laws, but what about their spouses? The stigma and misinformation surrounding HIV is such that people who interact with these populations are often denied services on the theory that they are more likely than the general population to become infected. Obviously, it is possible to decrease the risk of infection significantly by taking certain precautions, but many people nevertheless are denied access to healthcare and insurance due to their association with HIV+ individuals. I learned and wrote about which

arguments are persuasive under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and various state and local laws. It was gratifying to see my hours of research reflected in memoranda distributed to the legal department, and to hear possible arguments and strategies carefully weighed by senior attorneys during weekly meetings.

Finally, one of the most rewarding aspects of the summer fellowship was staffing the Legal Help Desk. Lambda Legal provides a national hotline for people to call in with questions related to LGBT/HIV legal issues. Lambda will sometimes represent callers and build cases from the issues their calls present. Of course, as a practical matter, not every call turns into a case that is taken on by the organization, but each caller is heard and given a thoughtful response by interns and legal assistants. Throughout the summer, I took approximately 45 calls from people of all ages and walks of life – from a 15-year-old transgender student in a southern state who wanted advice on how to legally change his name, to a septuagenarian widower trying to resolve an issue surrounding his late partner’s estate. I provided each caller with relevant legal information so that they could further educate themselves (and in some cases, represent themselves as pro se litigants in court). Many callers were provided with contact information for LGBT-friendly attorneys willing to take cases pro bono or for reduced fees. It is encouraging to know that such a powerful resource exists for LGBT and HIV+ people across the country, free of charge.

Overall, the remarkable chance to work alongside some of the top litigators in the field, and to contribute my efforts to the work of an organization that is at the forefront of the LGBT civil rights movement, was simply a dream come true. I am truly grateful for the experience this fellowship has allowed me to pursue, and will carry it with me as I begin my practice as an attorney.

I hope that Equal Justice America is able to continue its vital mission of providing public interest-minded law students with the funding they often lack – both for the law students who wish to gain experience providing legal services, and for the underrepresented communities that your fellowships so nobly serve. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rachel Russell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel J. Russell
J.D. Candidate 2017
Brooklyn Law School



August 25, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13450 E. Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Re: Rachel Russell's Fellowship with Lambda Legal

Dear Mr. Ruben,

As one of the supervisors of Lambda Legal's summer internship program, I am so pleased to report to you on the success of Rachel Russell's fellowship with us this summer.

As you may know, Lambda Legal is a national non-profit law firm with a mission of securing the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and people living with HIV. Our work includes impact litigation, advocacy, and educational efforts on a wide range of issues affecting the population we serve. Rachel spent the summer in our national headquarters in New York, where she had the opportunity to work with both regional attorneys and directors of national projects, such as our Transgender Rights Project and our LGBTQ Youth in Out-of-Home Care Project.

Our summer fellows engage in a wide range of projects to support our litigation and advocacy. Rachel provided our legal team with foundational research on matters including the viability of certain associational discrimination claims under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the availability of compensatory and punitive damages in cases arising under the Fair Housing Act and state housing discrimination laws, recent 2nd Amendment jurisprudence and gun violence prevention, civil Gideon claims, and LGBT-specific provisions of child protective services contracts. Beyond research memos, Rachel helped draft a memo to the entire legal staff proposing that we undertake litigation addressing the denial of health care to a transgender man and participated in weekly Legal Department strategy meetings. She also drafted a demand letter to a state agency on behalf of a would-be foster parent encountering sexual orientation discrimination and she assisted in identifying potential plaintiffs among the many

transgender individuals who have contacted Lambda Legal regarding discriminatory rules for changing gender markers on their birth certificates. Rachel handled these assignments professionally, thoroughly, and capably, helping advance our work on these fronts immeasurably.

In addition, our summer fellows staff Lambda Legal's Help Desk. We receive inquiries from individuals around the country seeking assistance on legal issues connected to their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or HIV status, or otherwise looking for LGBT-friendly legal help. The Help Desk is a critical service at Lambda Legal, both because it is a conduit for potential impact cases and information about the issues facing the LGBT community and people living with HIV across the country, and because we connect those who contact us with information and lawyer referrals to address their specific legal needs confidentially and free of charge. Rachel took a shift every week, responding to these inquiries, gathering information about the issues callers presented, and providing information about those issues and referrals to appropriate attorneys who can directly represent them. Rachel's service to these callers and to the Help Desk staff was significant.

We are so grateful to Equal Justice America for enabling Rachel to work with us this summer. The availability of this type of funding is critical to Lambda Legal's ability to attract top-notch public interest-focused law students like Rachel, whose work helps us to fulfill our commitment to the civil rights of LGBT people and people living with HIV. Thank you very much for your support.

Sincerely,



Karen L. Loewy
Senior Attorney