

Mr. Dan Ruben  
Executive Director, Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I want to thank Equal Justice America for making crucial and meaningful interventions in our nation's legal landscape. Sponsoring my school's Temporary Restraining Order Project (as overseen by New Haven Legal Assistance Association) means promoting increased access to justice and safety for poor citizens. We work with clients who have nowhere else to go – no extensive pre-existing relationships with attorneys who can easily get marshals to serve TROs based on the other work (e.g., divorce matters) they are regularly giving them. Instead, our clients must come to the courthouse, vulnerably tell their stories about fear and violence, hope for a favorable ex parte decision from the judge, and then find marshals on duty within very limited hours, hoping the TRO gets served properly. In an underfunded system, we have seen far too many TROs slip through the cracks. It is crucial, then, that we do our part in making sure our role in the process gets done the best it can.

That role of ours is helping these clients file their applications, and especially helping them organize their affidavit in a user-friendly and intuitive way. Clear communication to a judge is vital. So much written material passes in front of her or his eyes every day. We want the client to put their best foot forward, emphasizing what has happened most recently and has put them in greatest fear of their life or person. This involves having the client do drafts of the affidavit to get it right. The story is always their own from start to finish, as is their writing and structure. But we are there for feedback and support, assisting them in bringing out a coherent narrative from the understandably inchoate mass of details and events that populate their experience.

I have dealt with a client who was in very real fear of danger from her ex-partner. In addition to past violence and continuing threats of violence, her ex was allegedly breaking into her car and home, sometimes stealing things, sometimes simply re-arranging things in subtle and threatening ways to communicate: I'm here, I'm watching. There had been police-ordered TROs in the past and some were pending, but she needed the additional security of a judge-ordered TRO as a gap-filler to make sure this man could not get near her. It was absolutely crucial to have this client tell her story coherently in order to get a TRO granted. She was understandably shaken upon arriving. Through conversation and drafting, we were able to find the most understandable way of telling the complicated history of violence and threats that marked this relationship. She was able to move forward with a TRO against the ex.

There are many such occurrences in our office in the courthouse, each with their own complex fact pattern. I see it as extremely rewarding to help clients in need feel

safer. The look on a previously cynical client's face when a TRO has been granted is unmistakable – it is the expression registering that the legal system need not be an ominous force trying to hold one down but rather can be an institution to help, to protect, and to feel partial ownership within. My work is made immensely richer by seeing those small discoveries happen more and more often.

Many thanks again for the opportunity and best wishes for the organization's massively important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Benjamin Woodring". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Benjamin Woodring  
J.D. Candidate, Yale Law School '16