



## YOUTH DEFENDER CLINIC

August 30, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I worked in the Youth Defender Clinic at the East Bay Community Law Center in Berkeley, California. My work consisted of representing clients in school expulsion hearings and working with clients involved in the juvenile justice system. The experience I had was invaluable and it opened my eyes to the realities of the school-to-prison pipeline, the impact of the justice system on youth and their families, and how crucial rights education and policy advocacy is to advancing changes in the justice system.

I directly served several clients by representing them in their school expulsion hearings. My first client was a college-bound hispanic high school student. He had never been disciplined in school, but had an unfortunate incident with another student which led the Principal to recommend expulsion under the California Education Code. Unlike most of our clients, Luke\* had good grades and was a perfect case to argue for him not to be expelled. By the end of the hearing and after cross-examination of the Principal and the alleged victim, my colleague and I were able to successfully shift the conversation from immediate expulsion to a more just resolution that protected the interests of all parties. In the end, Luke received a suspended expulsion allowing him to complete the rest of the school year at home, receive his diploma, and start college in the fall.

Luke's case was an amazing victory for him, his parents, and for the clinic. Instead of punishing him for the act committed, the interests of the parties became the focal point for deciding the best outcome. Luke thanked us for representing him and the outcome of the case. While it was a great victory given the facts of the case, the victory was bittersweet in light of another clients' case.

When I met John\*, he was facing expulsion for an incident with a school administrator. Unlike Luke, John had a disciplinary record and did not have good grades. As I got to know John better, I learned that the suspension and expulsion was a violation of his probation. It was not until later, when I discovered John had a bench warrant for failure to appear in court. The more I worked on his case and with him, it seemed that the list of problems continued to grow. My role expanded from educational advocate to social worker/legal advocate.



The morning of the expulsion hearing, John lost hope that he would receive a fair hearing. He felt targeted by the school. During the expulsion hearing, it became very clear that the Principal and school administrator did not have sufficient evidence for the charges they sought and were seeking expulsion based on John's past history of disciplinary problems. The board members also noticed the folly of the situation. Similar to Luke's case, we advocated for and received an alternative decision that did not include expulsion. Instead, John was directed to attend a GED program. John regained some hope that an institution would treat him fairly.

The next hurdle was getting John into court to address his bench warrant. For a couple of weeks, John evaded our calls and requests for meetings. After speaking with our supervisor, our strategy was to do some initial relationship building. I drove to his location and just listened to him talk about his life, the trauma he faced in recent years, his dreams, and his fears. After that conversation, the lines of communication opened. He answered and returned every call. He even showed up for court to turn himself in despite his hesitation. Upon his release from temporary detainment, he and his grandmother were extremely thankful for the work we did and the services we lined up for him upon his release to comply with his probation terms and to support him in creating better opportunities for his life.

Leaving California was difficult given the bond I created with John. It meant a great deal to me that he shared his life and trusted me to come in at one of the darkest moments of his life and help him make the best legal choices for his situation. Working with Luke and John thought me so much about the need to approach youth defense from a non-judgmental position, the benefits of client-centered legal advocacy and holistic representation, and the power of listening to the client and their story. The experience I received by having my own clients, prepping for hearings, representing clients in a mini-trial hearing, conducting investigations, and visiting clients in juvenile hall was priceless and gave me a strong foundation to build on for a career as a litigator.

Although I believe I helped my clients, I think they helped me more by teaching me how to be a good lawyer. I walked away this summer with a deep appreciation for the story each human has and with the important lessons of never judging or making assumptions, or underestimating the power people have to change and fight for freedom of life and liberty.

Thank you for granting me this opportunity by awarding me the Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chayla C. Jackson".

Chayla C. Jackson  
J.D. Candidate, Class of 2015  
Georgetown University Law Center



August 29, 2013

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
Building II, Suite 204  
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Midlothian, VA 23112

RE: Evaluation of Chayla Jackson for Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

It is my pleasure to write an evaluation of Chayla Jackson's summer fellowship at the East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC). I was Chayla's supervisor in the Youth Defender Clinic (YDC), one of the practice areas within EBCLC. Chayla was a terrific summer fellow.

The Youth Defender Clinic takes a multimodal approach to meeting the legal and social service needs of youth caught at the intersection of the juvenile justice and education systems. This involves representing clients in school discipline and special education proceedings, as well as in juvenile court. Because YDC's case load is intentionally kept very low, each advocate (be it a lawyer or law student) gets to know their clients very well.

Over the summer, Chayla worked on a range of cases. She represented two clients in expulsion hearings, and I am pleased to report that she won both hearings. She also represented a client on an expulsion appeal and assisted me in a robbery trial in juvenile court. Needless to say, Chayla had a busy and very productive summer. She did terrific work and her clients still ask after her.

Chayla's work ethic was impressive. She often worked late and over the weekends to help her clients. She never complained about the workload and was a terrific team player. She asked for help when she needed it, but was also very independent. Chayla's commitment to public interest law is impressive and admirable. She cares so much about her clients and her work product reflected as much. Her clients, in turn, trusted Chayla and she had a great relationship with all of them.

In short, it was a pleasure to work with Chayla this summer. I am grateful to Equal Justice America for providing Chayla with the support to join us this summer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kate Weisburd'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katherine Weisburd  
Supervising Staff Attorney