

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I accepted a position to work in the Consumer Law division of the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia. As an intern I assisted Legal Aid attorneys Heather Latino, Tom Papsen, and Stacy Santin in representing clients in proceedings in D.C. Superior Court. I had the opportunity to conduct courthouse intake and observe hearings and mediations. I assisted in representing clients in abusive debt collection cases by researching D.C. law, writing memoranda, drafting motions and demand letters, and disputing credit reports. I was also able to engage in systemic advocacy to reform debt collections practice in Washington D.C. by drafting legal memoranda about debt-buying policy and assist with the drafting of the Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act of 2015.

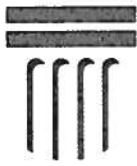
I met almost all of my clients at the Small Claims courthouse for debt collection cases. These clients were generally being sued for a debt by a party they did not recognize because it is common practice for large retailers to sell unpaid debts to third-party debt collectors. Additionally, many clients had been charged fees for add-on products they did not remember authorizing. We are able to talk to clients, then, go into mediation and work out deals that were affordable and beneficial to each client. If a client had few enough assets, we were even able to get the debt dismissed entirely with a hardship dismissal. Working with these clients was a stark reminder to me just how little many people in D.C. live off of each month. I frequently found myself wondering how they could possibly make ends meet with the financial circumstances they would describe.

Knowledge of complicated financial issues isn't the only thing preventing DC residents from accessing justice. One of the most notable issues I encountered this summer was the burden placed on people speaking Amharic. Amharic is a language spoken by Ethiopian natives, large populations of whom live in the D.C. area. The D.C. Courts have many interpreters for common languages such as Spanish, but Amharic interpreters are few and far between. Amharic speakers must frequently wait hours for an interpreter. This makes their entire court experience more difficult.

The Legal Aid Society helps vulnerable residents of communities, while treating them with dignity and respect. All people share a common humanity and after this summer, I feel more compelled than ever to use my legal skills to do what I can to alleviate the suffering caused by poverty and to rectify the conditions that perpetuate it.

Sincerely,

Christina Albertson
University of Virginia



Legal Aid Society
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

MAKING JUSTICE REAL

August 24, 2015

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

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL dan@equaljusticeamerica.org

RE: Intern Christina Albertson

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you for providing Christina Albertson with fellowship funding which allowed her to volunteer as a summer intern at the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia.

The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia is D.C.'s oldest and largest general civil legal services program. For more than 80 years, Legal Aid lawyers have been *making justice real* – in individual and systemic ways – for persons living in poverty in D.C. Legal Aid lawyers provide a continuum of legal services to clients in the areas of domestic violence/family, housing, public benefits, and consumer law. In addition to providing direct legal representation, we also help clients avoid unnecessary legal entanglements through outreach and education, and help them resolve their own disputes with advice and other brief assistance. We work with the ultimate goal of helping our clients, who are often in crisis, obtain life-changing legal representation resulting in safety, stability, and economic security. In our 2014 Annual Report you can see how our clients articulate the profound impact that our work has had in their lives.

Legal interns provide critical support to the work of our organization and lawyers. This summer, Ms. Albertson assisted attorneys in the Consumer Unit with staffing a court-based project where we provide same-day representation to low-income residents of the District of Columbia who are defendants in debt collection and foreclosure cases. At the court-based project Ms. Albertson helped our attorneys screen and interview potential clients, gather relevant documentation, prepare pleadings, research claims and defenses, and draft client correspondence.

We also provide full-representation to defendants in foreclosure and consumer debt collection cases. Ms. Albertson helped with numerous short and long-term research projects that assisted our attorneys to evaluate and consider different case strategies.

Ms. Albertson was a hardworking and reliable intern who is clearly committed to public interest work. Ms. Albertson has good interpersonal and time-management skills, which she demonstrated by seeking additional guidance regarding her assignments when necessary; affirmatively requesting deadlines and guidance regarding prioritization of work assignments; and seeking constructive feedback on her completed assignments. Ms. Albertson also showed initiative and good follow-through during the course of her internship. She did an excellent job of circling back to the attorneys who assigned her projects to report on her work, to suggest next steps, and to request additional assignments.

We hope that our internship experience also contributed to Ms. Albertson's growth as a future lawyer. Our organization and lawyers try to offer interns a variety of experiences including interacting with clients, research and writing, observing court hearings, and trainings geared toward public interest lawyers. We also tried to provide Ms. Albertson with detailed and constructive feedback regarding her research and writing throughout the course of her internship.

Thank you again for this opportunity to work with Ms. Albertson and for your support, through this fellowship, of the work that Legal Aid is doing to make justice real for low-income residents of the District.

Sincerely,



Heather Latino
Supervising Attorney & Director,
Consumer Law Unit