

August 27, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am a second-year law student at Columbia Law School, and I am writing to describe my 2015 Summer Fellowship experience, as well as to express my sincere appreciation for the support from Equal Justice America.

This summer, I worked as an intern at The Legal Aid Society in New York, specifically at the Juvenile Rights Practice in the Bronx office. JRP at Legal Aid represents around 90 percent of the children that appear before New York City Family Court in child protective proceedings, PINS (persons in need of supervision) cases and juvenile delinquency petitions.

I assisted the attorneys in many research and writing assignments, drafting motions and affidavits, but was also able to engage substantially in direct client representation. With support from my supervising attorneys, I participated in conferences, conducted investigations, and interviewed children and youth on the circumstances of their case as well as on how they wanted us to proceed as their legal representatives. Through this experience, I was able to see firsthand the kind of situations they faced, the challenges they faced in a legal system as youths, often with the added weight of racial and economic biases and prejudices against them. Yet I was also able to see how our advocacy on their behalf made significant, tangible differences in their lives, and how empowering it could be for our clients simply to have their voices heard and recognized.

For instance, I was closely involved in the case of a 17-year-old client with severe autism and other mental and developmental disabilities. His mother, having her own mental illness, was not able to take care of him in an appropriate manner, yet due to difficulties in finding a suitable foster care placement for him, our client was in danger of being sent back to a home environment that did not meet his needs and was quite damaging. My supervising attorney and I conducted investigations into alternative placements, researched and wrote motions, and advocated very strongly to have him placed at a residential treatment center. The motion I worked on ended up being granted, and our client was able to be placed in an environment that was appropriate and beneficial for him. We went to see him at a temporary care center he was staying at, and was able to see and hear how much he had improved already since being at that facility.

I also had the privilege of working on a case that my supervising attorney had had for a long time, of a young client who had been neglected by his mother and was placed in foster care. These placements were very difficult for him, and the attorney had worked tirelessly to reunify him with his grandparents. I was able to meet the client after a permanency hearing, and also see how much better he was doing with his family. He had, for example, been severely overweight before, from stress and psychological issues, but was now very healthy and active. He was also studying hard to make up for his lack of efforts while in foster care, and had shown marked improvement in his grades as well.

My Summer Fellowship experience has absolutely confirmed my passion and commitment to social justice and a career in public interest law. While I had always hoped to work in public interest law, the experience of being involved in our clients' cases and seeing what passionate, dedicated advocacy can do for them — not just in the courtroom, but actually in their lives — was one of the most affecting and meaningful experiences I have had since coming to law school, and has strengthened my dedication to using law as a tool for social justice.

Such a positive and educational experience at my summer internship could not have been possible without the support from Equal Justice America. I am sincerely grateful that I was able to be part of the Summer 2015 Fellowship program, and I hope that this program will continue to support other law students like myself and encourage future generations of lawyers to advocate for marginalized, vulnerable populations and to commit themselves to ensuring equal access to legal services.

Thank you again for your generosity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seung Eun Kim". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joanne (Seung Eun) Kim  
Columbia Law School, Class of 2017