

August 29, 2009

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Spending the summer as the legal intern at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House was as exciting as it was overwhelming. From day one I was treated as a full-time staff member. The office, consisting of three attorneys and four advocates, provides a variety of services to the residents of the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island who qualify as either low-income or elderly. I was given the opportunity to gain first-hand experience in a wide-variety of areas, including: advance directives, public entitlements, landlord tenant, and eviction prevention.

I sat in on numerous executions of Wills, Health Care Proxies, and Living Wills. In addition, I researched and drafted a memo detailing the substantive changes to the power of attorney legislation in the state of New York. I found this process to be especially interesting, and a great introduction to the skills I will learn in the Wills and Trusts course I am taking in the upcoming fall semester.

I did not have much experience in regards to public entitlement programs. The Legal Advocacy and Organizing department at Lenox Hill employs advocates specializing in Medicare/Medicaid, Food Stamps and Social Security benefits. Each program on its own is a marvelous display of the bureaucracy that exists in our government. I have always been interested in the various public entitlement programs that exist in our country, but only from a policy perspective. It was not until this summer that I was able to see first-hand how the system affects the individual. For example, how access to food stamp benefits can allow a person to change their eating habits, and thus, become healthier and less of a burden on the health care system. Overall, my experience in this area has opened my eyes to the types of reform that are needed in order to make the system both more efficient and more accessible.

I had the opportunity to work closely with the attorney in our office who specializes in housing issues, specifically, in preventing residents from eviction. In one instance, I was able to secure emergency relief funding for a woman who had fallen behind in her rent due to health reasons. This client was employed by the NYPD as a school safety agent when she was forced to take unpaid medical leave for an emergency hysterectomy. Though the surgery was covered by her insurance, her allocated sick leave was inadequate to support the amount of recovery time such a serious procedure requires. Our agency was able to not only provide her with a grant for a portion of her rental arrears, but also able to help her gather all necessary documents and guide her through the process of applying for a "one shot deal" with the Human Resources Administration.

In another case, I contacted a landlord on behalf of an elderly client who requested that her stove be replaced and her apartment painted. She had asked the landlord several times over the past months to provide the required maintenance, but he

refused to make the repairs. I realized that in the cases of rent-controlled or rent-stabilized tenants, landlords are reluctant to spend money on upgrades or maintenance. After a letter and phone call from our organization, he agreed to make the changes. This was a perfect example of why organizations like Lenox Hill are so valuable to the community.

None of my experiences this summer would have been possible without clients. From my first day in the office I was given the chance to meet, interview and advise clients who came to our offices seeking a variety of legal services. In the beginning, I realized I spent far too much time allowing the client to talk, many times about issues that were in no way related to their problem. I learned that in an office with such a high demand for services, we must encourage clients to get to the point as quickly as possible.

The only way to describe my summer is to say that it was one of the greatest, most challenging work experiences I have had so far. It is true that you learn the most when you are forced to learn as you go. I am so incredibly grateful to my supervisors and the staff in the Legal Advocacy and Organizing department for allowing me to work alongside them this summer. I am additionally grateful to you and the team at Equal Justice America for providing generous funding to myself and other students who wish to spend their summers helping the community. From a public interest perspective, there is no better way to see a legal education in action then to spend a summer at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House.

Sincerely,

Courtney Patterson
New York Law School
Class of 2011