

August 31, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you very much for the financial assistance Equal Justice America provides to assist individuals interested in pursuing public interest employment opportunities. I had the wonderful opportunity to work in the Civil Advocacy Program within the Legal Aid Justice Center in Charlottesville, Virginia. Through this program, I had the opportunity to assist low-income clients throughout Charlottesville and its neighboring communities with housing related problems.

A client experience that really stands out for me from the work I was involved in is a mother who came in concerned about the possibility of an eviction and the effect it might have on her children. This client initially came in because she had received notice from her landlord that she owed hundreds of dollars in rent and this landlord was going to start collecting overdue accounts. The client was distraught over the notice because she was under the impression that she was paying the correct amount of rent on a regular basis. The client was also on a fixed income and qualified for a public housing voucher managed through the local Housing Authority. This voucher helped to cover a portion of her rent each month but it also added to the confusion of what portion of the rent my client was responsible for.

The landlord, who was in the process of adjusting its HUD contract, was involved in major renovations that not only forced many of the residents to change apartment units but often led to confusion and contradicting information being presented to the residents over what rent was owed and when it needed to be paid. In the midst of this confusing process, the landlord changed property managers multiple times which only added to the confusion.

Through LAJC, I was able to coordinate audits of my client's account which served to identify a couple of months in which the local Housing Authority was paying a significantly lower portion of my client's rent than was required by law for her voucher type and income level. Additionally, I identified an inadequate notice of change in tenant contribution.

Once these problems were identified, the local Housing Authority agreed to pay the additional amount that they owed and to pay the difference in the rent owed for the month in which they provided an incorrect notice. In total, my client received enough to cover both the balanced owed to the landlord and an additional credit on her account. My client and her children can now live without the fear of eviction.

This case was a very inspiring case for me because it highlighted a lot of the positive parts of what public interest work entails. Through this case, I learned a lot of the nuances associated with housing law and through rigid application of the regulations surrounding the voucher program and cooperation from both the landlord and the local Housing Authority, we were able to work out a solution that resolved everyone's concerns while keeping a family in their home.

Thank you again for helping to make this kind of summer opportunity possible. Without the assistance of EJA I would have struggled to afford to spend my summer working with a program like LAJC.

Sincerely,

Cynthia A. McGrath
J.D. Expected 2016
University of Virginia School of Law