

September 8, 2005

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I worked as a legal intern for Rick Wagner, the Director of Litigation at Brooklyn Legal Services "Corporation A." Mr. Wagner works primarily on predatory mortgage lending cases, and I primarily assisted him by interviewing potential clients, helping to prepare for depositions, and drafting and researching an opposition to a motion to dismiss. The work was exciting, varied, and challenging. I feel that I made serious contributions to the work of Brooklyn Legal Services, while at the same time, learning not only about the ins and out of predatory mortgage lending, but much about legal research and writing as well as litigation strategy.

The first assignment given to me and the other interns involved investigating a real estate company about which many people in East Brooklyn had complained. This company had allegedly made all sorts of false promises and sold homes in conditions ranging from bad to horrible. We used public records to send letters to anyone who had purchased a home from this company in the last several years in which the price they paid varied significantly from the price that the company had recently purchased the home. This is often indicative of predatory lending.

We soon began receiving phone calls from people and making trips to their homes in order to conduct interviews and to see firsthand the problems that they were describing. We reviewed documents, took notes, and even took pictures. Later, at the office, we discussed whether or not these victims had the potential to serve as clients in a possible lawsuit. I found it rewarding to interact with many of these homeowners because, in many cases, we were the first people that had even bothered to hear their stories. I also found it interesting to discuss why or why not a victim might make a good client and to strategize about future litigation activity.

This legal internship created many opportunities to write and research. There are, comparatively, very few resources at Brooklyn Legal Services, which meant that our writing and research would be used and needed. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a party to one of the lawsuits, filed a motion to dismiss, claiming that Brooklyn Legal Services did not have standing to sue under the APA and could not tell HUD how to manage its internal affairs. We wrote a lengthy opposition that involved reading the original Congressional testimony that accompanied the creation of the Fair Housing Act. We also analyzed and offered our own interpretations on a recent Supreme Court case that HUD wanted to use to dismiss our lawsuit. I feel that I gained a better understanding of many substantive issues surrounding the law and also gained a better insight into the sort of work that one must put forth to create a well-written, well-researched memo.

I would recommend interning at Brooklyn Legal Services to anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of public interest work who also wants to have varied experiences with litigation. The internship provided me with a better idea of what sort of legal career I wish to have and also improved my research and writing skills. I also had fun – something that I had not anticipated.

Sincerely,

Douglas Cuthbertson
Fordham University School of Law