

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Before addressing my work this summer, let me first say how much I respect and appreciate the work you do through Equal Justice America. With our nation's huge disparity-of-wealth problem, your organization is an important part of the effort to fight against classism. I very much value the provision of legal services to those who could not otherwise afford them. Thank you so much for your generous support. I fully intend to donate to EJA in the future, when I become financially able.

This summer, I worked at the Child Advocacy Law Clinic, at the University of Michigan. Overall, my experience was positive. I helped several families, and learned much about how family law and child welfare law are practiced. My time was spent interviewing clients, writing briefs, attending "Team Decision Meetings" at DHS to decide where troubled children would be placed, and advocating for clients in the courtroom. The results achieved were positive and in the children's best interests.

I am most proud of having achieved the reunification of 5 children with their mothers. In one case, an 8-year-old girl had been removed from her home due to domestic violence and sexual abuse by the father. The mother, however, was relatively innocent, and had worked very hard to regain custody of her daughter. When I received the case, the mother had done everything she could do to regain custody, but was prevented in that goal by the recommendation of court-appointed therapist, whose sole objection to reunification seemed to be "the daughter isn't ready yet." I fought for the mother, both in court and in a Team Decision Meeting, and now the daughter and mother have been reunified, to everyone's benefit.

In another case, I achieved the reunification of 4 children with their mother. In this case, the children had been removed for both domestic violence and drug issues. The mother had done very well in complying with the court ordered service plan, but had missed some drug screens. Even so, I nearly achieved reunification in the middle of the summer. I requested an accelerated hearing in 6 weeks, rather than 3 months, to review the mother's compliance with drug treatment, and then worked with both her and DHS to make sure everything ran smoothly during that time. After 6 weeks, I did manage to achieve reunification of the children with their mother. This result was clearly best for all, as the children had been placed in 4 different foster homes since their removal 9 months before, and had experienced both mental and physical abuse while in foster care. I am proud to have been a part of improving these children's lives.

I also made progress on several other cases, both in child advocacy and juvenile justice. Additionally, I helped out a professor by researching the parental right to counsel in dependency and termination hearings in all 50 states. The most important part of this summer's experience, however, was putting theory into practice. Being in the courtroom, asking the judge to apply the law to a certain set of facts, and achieving the desired result, was very gratifying, and has made me feel much more capable. The experience I gained this summer is invaluable. I feel ready for a legal career. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Dustin Feigerle

UMich Law '10