

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My work at LAF has been an unbelievable experience in the “real world” of law. I have worked on a whole variety of legal issues inflicting our poorest citizens, including eviction, unemployment, consumer fraud and medical benefit cases. My experience at LAF was an eye opener about the problems facing the urban poor on Chicago’s Southside. Tenants improperly evicted for insufficient reasons, employees denied benefits without justification, and disabled individuals subject to a year of continued hearings and lost records are common place occurrences at my office. I had the opportunity to follow these cases from start to finish. From intake, to case acceptance, to complaints and responses, depositions, hearings and settlement, I have had an incredible opportunity to observe law at the basest level. Throughout the summer, I encountered struggling families dealing with losing a home, a job, or an only source of income.

Two cases stand out in my mind. One was a case I worked on very early. The client was denied unemployment benefits, and we were appealing that decision. When I first looked over the case materials, I felt we had a weak case. The lawyer on the case decided to take the case and asked me to write a brief to submit to the court. I was a bit discouraged at this seemingly losing task. I continued to research and write the brief, and along the way I picked out cases and holdings that built a powerful argument for our side. By the time I turned to completed brief into the lawyer on the case, I was certain we had a strong, if not winning argument. The lawyer was extremely pleased at the argument I managed to fashion out of meager case law and a shaky position. That experience taught me that I have to power to influence decisions. Our client was clearly in the right, she should have received unemployment benefits, but the law was not on her side. I learned that by extensive research and careful writing, I can make unfavorable law support my position, and a deserving client can gain much needed assistance.

The second case was an individual I represented at a medical benefits hearing. Public aid offices are notorious for losing records and convincing applicants to drop their case. My hearing was no different. However, because I was their representing our client, the agency bullying went nowhere. We continued the hearing, and directly submitted another records packet to the office supervisor. The case is not yet concluded, but I know that my office will continue to pursue the case and not allow it to be dropped. Once again, I saw the power of being a lawyer. Just my presence in a hearing changed the power balance, and made it possible for a deserving client to keep persevering on her path to gain medical benefits.

My time at LAF made me realize that I can make a difference in the world. Having a legal education gives me the tools to shape the existing law and fight for the positions I believe in. Knowledge of the law, more than anything, is power. It is the power of knowing your rights as an American citizen. As lawyers educated in those rights, it is our duty to inform those less educated in the protection those rights afford, as well as aid them in enforcing those rights. I have learned law is not about winning in the most basic sense. It is about fairness. I am grateful that my Equal Justice America grant helped support me in this experience. My education this summer has been as valuable as anything I learned at law school.

Sincerely,

Emily Throop
Candidate for Juris Doctor 2009
University of Chicago Law School