

August 29, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thanks to the funding I received from Equal Justice America, I was able to work this summer in the Harlem Community Law Office of The Legal Aid Society. I learned a great deal from this experience and now feel better suited to continue work in the legal profession.

My internship involved various research and writing assignments, drafting of public literature, community outreach, and direct client contact. I researched many different legal issues, some of them difficult, for ongoing cases in the Housing Development Unit. I subsequently wrote internal memos or memoranda of law to be filed in housing court or Supreme Court. I came across some familiar concepts from my first year of law school, but dealt with others that were unfamiliar, presenting a greater challenge to find the right answer. However, these assignments were often the most rewarding.

In addition to legal writing, I also drafted informational literature on the Infill Redevelopment Project planned by the New York City Housing Authority. The flyer was designed to inform NYCHA residents of their rights and the legal obligations imposed on NYCHA by federal law. The ongoing plan involves leasing current housing property to private developers to build new high-rise housing, and The Legal Aid Society's main goal was to ensure that the concerns of the residents are heard and considered.

Beyond office assignments, I also did a great deal of outreach to buildings in the Tenant Interim Lease (TIL) program, a transitional program designed to train tenants in managing their building before converting to a co-op. This exposed me to a wide range of housing conditions in Harlem and allowed me to talk with tenants about their experience and whether the city is making all necessary repairs. Many TIL buildings have been in the program for ten years or more, and while most tenants want to complete the conversion to a co-op so they can own their buildings, I learned that it is often difficult for tenants to come together and obtain assistance from sources like The Legal Aid Society.

As interesting and rewarding as these activities were, the part of my internship that stands out to me most was my work with the Single Stop clinic. There, I assisted my supervisor in interviewing low-income people with a variety of legal issues. Following the initial interview,

we would determine whether we could provide further advice or formal representation. This work was especially meaningful to me because I was able to hear the client describe their problem firsthand and then go back to the office and try to find a solution for them. I was given great responsibility with these assignments, as I mostly took charge and maintained sole contact with the client. For example, one gentleman, a senior citizen with limited eyesight, received a child support bill in the mail from the New York state collection agency. The state was also garnishing his SSI, which is prohibited by law. It was my job to be clear on the law regarding the garnishment, seek out the facts surrounding his past payments, and give him all the necessary forms to challenge the arrears. This required me to maintain contact with him and his home attendant and put in writing the steps he must take, in plain English. I left the internship immensely satisfied knowing that I had helped someone and set the solution in motion.

I will never forget my experience at The Legal Aid Society. Thanks to the generous assistance from Equal Justice America, I was able to have a meaningful summer that will inform my future career path.

Sincerely,

Erik Chamberlin  
Columbia Law School, Class of 2015