

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I spent this past summer working at The Legal Aid Society, in the Prisoners' Rights Project (PRP). My experience at Legal Aid was one of immeasurable value. The combination of attentive, caring, and intelligent supervisors, with meaningful and substantive work, made me excited to get up to go to Legal Aid every day. My supervisors gladly answered all of my questions and were as eager to share their knowledge as I was to learn it.

My work at PRP focused primarily on assisting incarcerated individuals in state prison, and was split between larger scale projects and more personal advocacy. My first week at PRP, I scheduled a legal call with a client who was having difficulty obtaining adequate mental health treatment while incarcerated. I spoke with him on the phone to learn more about his situation, and wrote to the facility to advocate on his behalf. At the end of the summer, both he and his family had thanked me for working to help him throughout the internship. There was limited success in changing his situation, but his gratitude was incredibly rewarding.

I conducted phone interviews and corresponded with incarcerated individuals on a daily basis, and quickly developed a good rapport with several of our clients. The interviewing process was an interesting one, as some of the clients had not told their stories before. Some clients were currently experiencing problems, and needed to express their frustration and anger with the inadequacies of the system that continued to fail them. Others spoke about trying to recover from trauma they experienced in the past. For example, I had a phone interview with a young woman who had been sexually assaulted by a corrections officer. While she was speaking to me, she began to cry, and explained how difficult, but healing, it was to talk about the experience. I felt honored to be able to listen to her talk about her experiences and try to advocate for her in whatever way possible.

I was also able to conduct in person interviews at several prisons in the state, regarding accusations of brutality. Noticing my development of the skills required to interview clients on sensitive matters was a rewarding experience. I surprised myself when I started to feel

comfortable and confident in my own abilities to conduct interviews and obtain important information.

The summer work included research into administrative segregation, a form of isolated confinement. I sent questionnaires to clients in administrative segregation, read and analyzed their responses, and updated the PRP memo that is sent to clients.

I would not have had nearly the same amount of client contact or substantive work elsewhere, and am incredibly grateful for this opportunity. The summer at PRP helped me develop skills that I hope will help me be a smart and compassionate advocate throughout my future. Interning at PRP was the first time I got involved in prisoners' rights, and now I can certainly see myself doing this kind of work every day.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Hickey

Fordham University School of Law