

September 23, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I had the opportunity to intern with East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC) in Berkeley, California. My summer with EBCLC's Housing Unit was more rewarding than I could have imagined and solidified my desire to become an advocate for low-income tenants.

My work was focused on representing clients in landlord-tenant disputes and in disputes with the housing authority. I was entrusted with my own caseload where I was the point of contact for my clients and opposing counsel. In addition to my cases, I helped staff a weekly Tenants' Rights Workshop entailing one-on-one meetings with tenants to discuss their legal issues and suggest solutions. I also held weekly pro per appointments to assist self-representing clients in filing court paperwork, usually helping them write answers to complaints. My individual case work typically involved writing motions, writing letters to the Oakland Housing Authority, and negotiating with opposing counsel. I negotiated many favorable settlements with opposing counsel in my own cases and even more at EBCLC's courthouse clinic.

Ms. Jones¹ was one of the clients I had the privilege of working with over the summer, and I took care of her case from start to finish. Earlier this year, Ms. Jones lost her job after a domestic violence incident occurred in her home. She was able to survive off her small amount of savings for a few months, but ended up falling behind in rent once her savings ran low. Ms. Jones' landlord served her with an eviction notice and an unlawful detainer for non-payment of rent in June. Ms. Jones had been living in the same rent-controlled apartment in Oakland for many years, so her rent amount was very low. Oakland has become a quickly gentrifying city, and if she were to be evicted from her

¹ Name has been changed.

apartment, it would be close to impossible for her to ever find a unit for that low amount of rent ever again.

Ms. Jones had been in contact with a local organization that had agreed to pay her back rent, but they needed confirmation that her landlord would accept the check. Ms. Jones had been trying to get in touch with her landlord by calling him or sending him emails for months, but he never replied. She felt stuck. Thankfully, Ms. Jones contacted EBCLC and we were able to take on her case. I was able to get in touch with her landlord's attorney right away and start talking about the possibility of Ms. Jones keeping her apartment. Within a month, we reached a settlement where the local organization paid for all of Ms. Jones' back rent, and Ms. Jones was able to stay in her home. Because I had taken over the burden of negotiating with her landlord and his attorney, Ms. Jones was able to spend time looking for a job. Within a month, she had two new jobs and was getting back on her feet financially.

When I first met Ms. Jones, she felt scared, helpless, and was still struggling to find a job. In our last meeting while she was signing the settlement documents, Ms. Jones was bright, cheerful, and could not stop thanking me. She told me that because I took the burden of possible eviction off her shoulders, she was able to get back on her feet.

My work at EBCLC was an empowering experience for me and for the tenants like Ms. Jones that I assisted. I am grateful for the generous funding of Equal Justice America that allowed me to spend my summer doing such meaningful and impactful work. Thank you for choosing me to participate in this program.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Waldron
Georgetown University Law Center
Class of 2018