

To: Dan Ruben, Executive Director at Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank Equal Justice America for making a truly incredible summer possible. I spent the summer working with Vermont Legal Aid's Housing Discrimination Law Project. Vermont is a rural state with a high rate of poverty and very limited rental housing stock, and many landlords openly discriminate against applicants. In these difficult conditions, Vermont Legal Aid is doing impressive work to ensure fair housing opportunities for all Vermonters, and I am honored to have had the opportunity to join them for the summer.

I helped tenants whose landlords had refused to grant them reasonable housing accommodations – several needed to keep emotional support animals; one needed an apartment that could be reached by elevator. I helped a renter who had experienced racial harassment in his home so bad that he had begun to sleep in a shelter to avoid going home. I helped a Native American tenant whose landlord had forbidden him from burning ceremonial herbs in his home – an important religious practice for him – because the landlord claimed it violated the building's no-smoking policy.

Vermont Legal Aid does extensive fair housing testing, and I did wide-ranging legal research laying the groundwork for impact litigation cases to be brought using testing evidence.

I wrote know-your-rights materials helping Vermonters to understand their rights to discrimination-free housing. For example, [this](http://www.vtlawhelp.org/discrimination-based-race-or-color) is one of the pages I drafted [http://www.vtlawhelp.org/discrimination-based-race-or-color].

I drafted a letter to all of Vermont's subsidized housing providers explaining HUD's recent guidance on when arrest records and criminal background checks may and may not be used as a basis for housing decisions. I attended community meetings on the building of tiny homes to house homeless individuals.

I went into this summer with a passion for ensuring fair access to housing and for serving the sort of rural community that I grew up in. I came out of it with a summer of fantastic training behind me, better prepared and more committed than ever to pursuing this goal.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rachel Smith
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J.D. Class of 2018