

Dear Dan Ruben, Executive Director of Equal Justice America,

I wanted to say how grateful I am to EJA for helping to fund my summer working at Greater Boston Legal Services in the housing unit. This summer I worked on close to twenty cases, not including the clients we only saw at clinics. Our cases focused on clients who were at risk of eviction and/or losing their public housing benefits.

One of the most significant cases I worked on this summer involved a client who had lost at trial when she represented herself pro se. Her landlord had brought an eviction suit against her when failed to pay rent while she was waiting for a government agency to determine what her rent share was. I helped draft a brief for the Massachusetts Court of Appeals explaining that our client had only failed to pay her rent because she had been waiting on government agencies to notify her what her rent responsibility was after a recent change in her employment status.

Another case I worked on involved a client with a disability and a landlord who wanted to evict that client for displaying symptoms of his disability. I did research regarding reasonable accommodations and sorted through the documents on file to determine precisely what, if any, accommodations the landlord had already made. So armed, I was able to suggest changes in the language to the draft agreement sent to us by opposing counsel and to raise points in negotiations with opposing counsel. I was able to bring into question the framework of the agreement suggested by the landlord's counsel and to offer an alternative framework for an agreement that better took into consideration our client's disability.

One of the last cases I assisted this summer involved a client who lost her housing as well as her Section 8 voucher and who was appealing the decision to terminate her voucher. The client had appealed the housing agency's decision to terminate her housing benefit in state court, but the agency had removed the case to federal court. I worked on a memo submitted to the

district court that argued the case should be remanded to state court where we hope to more quickly reestablish housing for our client.

Getting to work on these cases and other cases like them this summer has opened my eyes to the ways the legal system is used to deprive those in need of housing, but this experience has also shown how that same system can be used to protect those people as well. I had the wonderful benefit of working with an attorney who has been working on housing cases for years. As I did legal research for our current cases, I was constantly coming across cases my supervisor had litigated in the past that had become law and were now providing legal protections to our current clients. Seeing the cumulative work of a career spent building a foundation of legal rights for those in need demonstrated so clearly that this kind of work is not only important for our clients facing a crisis in the moment. Each case provides an opportunity to improve the lives of countless people going forward one small step at a time. And that is the lesson I will take away from my incredible time at Greater Boston Legal Services. My thanks again to Equal Justice America for helping to provide this opportunity to me.

Joseph Ptomey

Harvard Law School – 2019