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

## Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to thank Equal Justice America for my fellowship grant and to share a bit about my experience.

I spent the summer as a legal intern with Greater Boston Legal Service's (GBLS)

Housing Unit. The unit's mission is to prevent evictions of low-income clients, help homeless families obtain shelter, provide representation and guidance to tenant associations, advocate for victims of abuse facing housing challenges, and generally help to preserve affordable housing in the Boston area. I specifically worked on a team that represents clients with disabilities who were facing evictions. I had many opportunities to practice critical legal skills, including researching and writing on housing law precedent, drafting and filing motions, interviewing clients, observing court proceedings, and negotiating with opposing counsel. But the most important part of my summer, by far, was meeting, learning from, and serving our clients.

Most tenants in Boston and across the country must fight evictions without the help of an attorney. Landlords, on the other hand, are significantly more likely to have legal representation. This imbalance makes tenants vulnerable to abusive landlords, both in and out of the court room. Low-income tenants, like all of GBLS' clients, are particularly at risk of abuse.

In one case I worked on the tenant suffered from cognitive disabilities. She had lived in the same apartment for nearly ten years without incident. Ostensibly, her landlord was seeking to force her to move out in thirty days so that he could sell the building. We soon discovered that \$200 on top of her contracted rent. The landlord had taken advantage of her cognitive disabilities, threatening her with eviction if she didn't pay him above and beyond what was required by her lease for the entire length of her tenancy. While the case has not yet been resolved, the client is now in a strong negotiating position. GBLS attorneys will likely be able to negotiate significant funding for her to move into a new, more secure home.

In another case, we represented a client who suffered from PTSD due to a previous abusive relationship. Her landlord was attempting to evict her for occasionally refusing to let maintenance workers into her apartment. As we got to know the client, we learned that she was uncomfortable with strangers coming into her home because of her history with abuse. She was especially concerned about the safety of her children and an elderly relative with dementia who lived with her. We were able to negotiate with the landlord so that he would give her advance written notice of any maintenance workers and she could have nine months to move out. Our agreement ensured that the landlord would give future potential landlords a neutral reference and her Section 8 youcher would be secure.

These are just a few examples of this summer's cases, which reveal the vulnerability of low-income tenants. The clients we assisted had serious, life-altering disabilities that were directly related to their evictions. One fell behind on rent when she lost a job because she needed to increase the frequency of her dialysis. Another was evicted for loud noises, despite the fact that her partially-deaf daughter was unable to judge the volume of her own voice. Others I helped with suffered from cancer, liver disease, epilepsy, degenerative disc disease, and many other severe illnesses. Without GBLS' representation, most of them would be homeless.

It was an eye-opening and inspirational summer. I was amazed by the disregard for law and decency by some of the city's landlords. Even more shocking was the ease at which they

were able to get away with it. But I was also amazed at the strength of our clients and the measurable impact legal representation made on their cases. I am sincerely grateful to EJA for enabling my experience.

Sincerely,

Megan Field

J.D. Candidate – Class of 2019

Harvard Law School

Megan Field



September 7, 2017
Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II – Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Rd.
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to you about Megan Field's summer internship this summer. Megan worked with me in the housing unit at Greater Boston Legal Services. We prevented many evictions and subsidy terminations for tenants who have disabilities and are facing subsidy terminations and/or evictions. Megan's internship was made possible through funding from Equal Justice America. I benefited from her work here as did our clients.

Megan did a great job and was ready and willing to take on challenging substantive legal issues and projects and had no problem completing the minor tasks. Megan paid close attention to detail and made sure to look for and fight for all the available defenses for her clients. In one of our eviction cases, our client was being evicted for reasons related to loud noises coming from her apartment. Megan did all the research and learned that our client's daughter had a hearing impairment. She therefore was unable to know how loud she was being whether verbally or by playing around and causing noise that way. Megan worked with the daughter's doctors to gather documentation of the hearing impairment and evidence that loud noise was a result of the child being unable to know how loud she was being. We requested a reasonable accommodation to the landlord asking them not to evict our client but rather to provide some sound dampening

materials that would prevent too much noise from bothering neighbors. After much negotiation, and after Megan gathered documentation about the landlord failing to take the proper procedural steps in the termination process, the landlord's attorney agreed to accommodate our client, rather than evict her and her family.

It was a great summer working with Megan and I am appreciative of EJA for making that possible. I am a former recipient of EJA summer funding. It certainly helped me start out my legal services career, also at GBLS, and I look forward to working with future interns supported by EJA.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Deena Zakim Equal Justice Works Fellow Greater Boston Legal Services 197 Friend Street Boston, MA 02114 (617) 603-1663