

## HEATHER R. ABRAHAM

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August 11, 2009

Mr. Dan Ruben  
Equal Justice America  
Building II – Suite 204  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a second-year student at the University of Minnesota Law School who received a 2009 Summer Fellowship from Equal Justice America. Thank you for the financial support that made my internship possible.

Working at the Family Law Project of Legal Services of South Central Michigan afforded me opportunities to interview clients, assess legal needs of potential clients, draft motions, advise clients, and represent clients in Washtenaw County Circuit Court. Additionally, I served as a Spanish-speaking interpreter. Finally, I also attend events related to my internship, including observing a Spanish-speaking male batterers intervention program and Washtenaw County Street Outreach Court. The majority of my work focused on protection orders, divorce, custody, and immigration issues.

The first highlight of my summer was a July hearing to terminate a Personal Protection Order (PPO) filed against my client by her batterer. After enduring several years of abuse, my client left her abuser in January of this year. After their physical separation, he stalked and harassed her. He then obtained a PPO against my client, which has a variety of legal implications, including showing up on a person's future background checks and making her ineligible for certain activities and employment. In order to help her terminate the PPO, I worked with the client to gather information, including witnesses and a police report. With the supervision of the Family Law Project, I then represented the client in court. I directly examined the client, a witness, and cross-examined the opposing party. It was a highly contentious hearing but the judge ruled in our favor and dismissed the PPO.

A second highlight was a recent meeting with a client to prepare divorce papers. This client is in the process of leaving her abuser of over twenty years. She has lived in fear of her husband for over two decades but she has not shared her nightmare with other people until recently. During our meeting, she told me stories about his abuse that she had never told anyone before. The meeting was emotionally disheartening but at the same time very meaningful to me. I am drawn to this area of law precisely because my legal assistance gives her a real opportunity to leave her abuser.

A third significant experience I had this summer was a training for law clerks working with survivors of domestic violence. A prominent counselor from Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw County came to speak to us about a male batterers intervention program that he facilitates. He shared his observations from twenty years of experience as a group leader, including the excuses batterers employ to claim they are not abusive. He also dispelled common myths about domestic violence and invited us to attend intervention groups as observers. I later attended No Más, a group for Spanish-speaking male batterers. Through this experience, I gained a better understanding of the excuses and denials used by abusers, as well as effective ways to confront and challenge them, as demonstrated by the group leader. Afterward, I had a one-hour debriefing session with the leader who provided insight into some of the more subtle power dynamics at play in the group that I had not observed.

Over the course of my fellowship, I worked closely with over two dozen clients. I represented clients in four hearings, drafted seven divorce pleadings, and performed countless intake interviews.

As this was my first legal position, this fellowship afforded me the opportunity to learn how to draft pleadings and represent clients in court. I also learned about the systematic operations of the Michigan court system and the process of a divorce from beginning to end. Additionally, I identified an area of law that I am interested in exploring as a potential career. Most importantly, however, I helped dozens of women to take an important step toward regaining control of their lives.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to do such meaningful work

Sincerely,

Heather R. Abraham

University of Minnesota Law School, 2011