

September 20, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben;

I spent the summer working at the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) in Oakland, California. The internship was a wonderful experience, and I greatly appreciated having Equal Justice America funding. Having this funding made it possible for me to pursue an unpaid, public interest internship.

During my internship, I worked directly with an attorney whose work focuses around improving educational outcomes for foster children. It was a wonderful opportunity to grow very familiar with a specific area of the law. I had not had much exposure to the foster care system, but as a former preschool teacher, I was excited to work in the realm of education law. My attorney-supervisor provided me with a great deal of background reading to help me understand some of the complexities and problems in the area. I was struck by the incredibly poor educational outcomes of foster children, and it was wonderful to have an opportunity to use the law to help these at-risk children succeed in school.

Much of my summer was spent researching the role of the juvenile court in California in deciding who makes educational decisions for foster children. Although biological parents automatically retain the child's educational rights, the juvenile court, with the advice of the social worker, may take the educational decision-making rights away from the parent and give it to another person (family member, foster parent, community volunteer, etc.). This process is complicated, and I enjoyed synthesizing the various laws and looking at the limited legal precedents in the area. The memos that I produced on the laws in this area are now being used to strengthen the process of choosing an educational decision-maker in Santa Cruz County in California.

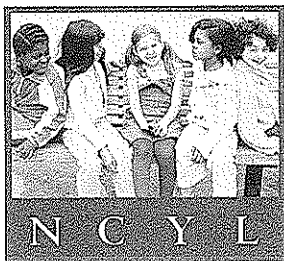
In addition to my legal research, I was able to take intake calls and work with individuals seeking legal help. This was a great way to learn about the problems that individuals face in the area of children's law. I spoke with people with a range of issues, and I was often able to find a quick fix for their problem. One of the most

interesting women that I worked with called with a concern about her foster caregiver payments. Her mother had been the legal foster parent for the caller's nephew, but the mother had recently passed away. The caller had taken over the caregiver role for her nephew, but she found that she was receiving lower payments than her mother had. The nephew was a teenager and had been in this household since he was an infant. The woman wanted to keep caring for him, but she was concerned that she could not afford to do so. She had contacted her social worker, but she was told that foster payments were not the social worker's job and that she could not help her. The woman was confused and felt that she had exhausted all of her possibilities for fixing her payments. Through reaching out to other organizations and working with the attorneys at my organization, I was able to learn that the payments had likely gone down because her mother had been a licensed foster provider, and this woman was not licensed. I was able to set her up with people to get licensed, and she was able to get her full payments. It was incredibly rewarding to help a woman in a tough situation, and I learned a lot about the foster payment system in the process.

I am extremely grateful to Equal Justice America for providing me with funding to complete this internship. I had a wonderful experience and gained real knowledge and skills. As a result of this internship, I have made a point to get more involved in education and family law opportunities at my law school, and I hope to keep this area of law as a focus in my legal career. Thank you for the opportunity!

Sincerely,

Jessie Ferguson  
NYU



## National Center for Youth Law

August 5, 2011

Katie Toman, Office Manager  
Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road  
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**John F. O'Toole**

Dear Ms. Toman,

I am an attorney at the National Center for Youth Law where I direct our FosterEd Initiative, a national project focused on improving the educational outcomes of foster children. I supervised Jessie Ferguson in her ten-week fellowship this summer and can assure you she did an exemplary job.

Jessie supported me in the work that I do to improve educational outcomes for foster children. She completed a variety of projects throughout the course of the summer, including conducting research on parenting practices that increase children's academic outcomes and drafting surveys to evaluate the efficacy of adults in providing effective educational support to foster children. These surveys will be administered as part of my work with foster youth in Indiana and California. Jessie also researched the laws that allow courts in California to limit the educational decision-making rights of parents whose children enter foster care and to appoint an educational representative to make educational decisions for the children. Additionally, Jessie supported me in applying for a federal grant in collaboration with several California state agencies.

I enjoyed working with Jessie and was glad to have her work with me for the past several weeks. Thank you for providing Jessie with the funding to enable her to complete an internship with the National Center for Youth Law this summer!

Sincerely,

Jesse Hahnel  
Director, FosterEd