

Date: August 29, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing after completing my Summer Fellowship position at Community Legal Aid (CLA) in Worcester. My position at CLA was with the Housing Unit, working with eight attorneys for ten and a half weeks. The Housing Unit at CLA deals with eviction defense, housing discrimination defense, as well as foreclosure defense for former homeowners and tenants in foreclosed buildings. In my position I was able to work closely with the attorneys to observe court hearings, trials and mediation, assist with trial and document preparation, interview clients, and research different topics surrounding housing law. I was able to be at the housing court in Worcester at least three times a week, and worked with several clients directly every day.

One of the cases I was assigned to work on within my first week at CLA was for two clients whose landlord was evicting them for no cause, from an apartment that had terrible conditions. Beyond the conditions defenses these clients had, the landlord had also stabbed one of our clients in the arm during a night where the landlord tried to take the clients belongings out of their apartment in the middle of the night. When I began working with these clients my first assignment was to draft the responses to discovery that the CLA attorney had received from opposing counsel. IN order to do this I spoke extensively with the clients about the conditions in their apartment, the night that the stabbing occurred, and general questions about their tenancy. I also visited the apartment with the attorney I was working with in order to document the conditions. After we sent in discovery, I continued to work with the clients to prepare them for the pending trial. Unfortunately, due to the criminal charges that were pending after the stabbing, the clients housing case has been continued to October, however, it is likely that they will win significant monetary damages due to the assistance they received from CLA in defending their eviction. In working all summer with these clients, I have seen the full power that legal aid can have and the impact that receiving legal assistance has had for these clients. Their appreciation for the legal assistance they received was empowering and reaffirmed my passion for legal services and my decision to pursue legal aid as a career choice.

Another client I worked closely with was a former homeowner whose house was being foreclosed on. The client had been living in the house for over thirty years and was devastated at the thought of having to leave her family home. The client had started to fall behind on her mortgage payments after losing her job, and was unable to work with the bank for a remedification plan for her payments. After

contacting CLA all of her foreclosure documents were reviewed, and defenses were discovered that would make a case for the client to remain in her home. Through the legal assistance of CLA the client was able to defeat the foreclosure because the foreclosing bank had not properly given the client right to cure notices, therefore defectively foreclosing under foreclosure law in Massachusetts. My work with this client was predominantly focused on research and writing, as this case was won through a motion for summary judgment. I worked closely with one of the foreclosure attorneys to draft the 150-page document. Through several revisions, the attorney allowed me to hone my research and writing skills, and we learned during my last week at the fellowship that the judge had ruled in favor of our motion for summary judgment, and that the client was going to be able to keep her house. Working with this client demonstrated how important legal services can be, especially when facing a large opponent such as a major bank or corporation.

My experience at my fellowship this summer has taught me invaluable practical skills that will continue to assist me in my legal career. One of the most important skills being how to take a client from having a problem that they are unclear about what to do, to forming a legal argument, bringing it to court, and in most cases, ending with a solution that is in the favor of the client. I enjoyed the attorneys I worked with and the responsibility that they gave me. I will be continuing volunteer work with CLA throughout the school year when my class schedule permits it, in order to continue to learn from the incredible lawyers at CLA.

I want to thank Equal Justice America (EJA) for all of the funds that I received in order to be able to work at CLA this summer and the continued efforts that EJA makes in the legal services field. I would be happy to answer any further questions that you have about my summer fellowship experience or the clients that I worked with, as there were several more than the two stories I explained in this letter.

Thank You,

Kaitlyn Smethurst

Suffolk University Law School

Class of 2015



Community Legal Aid

Serving Central and Western Massachusetts

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August 29, 2013

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Re: Kaitlyn Smethurst

Dear Mr. Ruben

Our office was extremely fortunate to have Kaitlyn with us this summer. She was placed in our Housing Unit, and supported the work of eight different attorneys. Our Housing Unit does a variety of work, including foreclosure prevention, post-foreclosure eviction defense, general eviction defense, and housing discrimination.

Kaitlyn worked with each of the eight attorneys, and each attorney had a positive experience. One of Kaitlyn's strengths was her ability to quickly become familiar with a client's case, and be able to research very complex legal issues on behalf of that client.

Kaitlyn assisted one of the foreclosure attorneys in the researching, drafting, and preparing of a successful motion for summary judgment on behalf of a post-foreclosure homeowner. The homeowner is now pursuing the possibility of repurchasing her home and is grateful for the additional time she has in her home. Kaitlyn also prepared and organized all of the exhibits for the motion which, given the number of exhibits, was not an easy task. She assisted another foreclosure attorney by researching the legal implications and possible outcomes of tax lien foreclosures.

Kaitlyn also worked on numerous eviction cases. Since eviction cases move fairly quickly, she was able to follow an eviction case from start to finish. She conducted initial client interviews, and presented the client's

case to the attorneys. Kaitlyn was especially skilled at working directly with clients. Many of our clients have complicated lives and are dealing with many stressors in their lives aside from their immediate legal need. Additionally, large portions of our client population are diagnosed with mental health illnesses. Kaitlyn was able to successfully communicate with these clients, and helped them stay focused with still remaining sympathetic. She was able to explain complex legal issue in simple language, which is a difficult skill to gain.

In addition to the initial client interviews, Kaitlyn assisted in every step of the eviction process, including drafting pleadings, drafting discovery questions, responding to discovery questions, and preparing the clients for court. She is a very quick learner, and she exceeded all of our expectations.

Kaitlyn was also open for any kind of work, so matter how small or big. She was able to appropriately prioritize her work, and juggled many deadlines and the needs and requests of multiple lawyers. When our office had to file an emergency complaint and request for a preliminary injunction on behalf of an elderly client who was denied an apartment for discriminatory reasons, Kaitlyn took a lead role in efficiently drafting the complaint, affidavit, motions, and memorandum of law. After reading the pleadings, the landlord's attorney agreed to let our client move into the apartment.

Kaitlyn was a joy to work with, and demonstrated a true dedication to public interest work. She immediately became an integral part of our team, and impressed us on a daily basis. She has a great legal mind and exceptional interpersonal skills, and she always had a wonderful attitude. We would highly recommend her for any future internships or legal employment.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Valerie Zolezzi-Wyndham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Valerie Zolezzi-Wyndham
Managing Attorney