

August 31, 2013

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

Mr. Ruben,

During the summer between my second and third years of law school, thanks in large part to funding from the Equal Justice America, I had the opportunity to spend my second consecutive summer at the Chicago Legal Clinic working on family law and ex-offender issues. I continue to find the work both challenging and deeply rewarding.

Working in family law this summer, I was able to gain significant experience understanding how to manage a case from start to finish. I spent much time talking with clients about their expectations and the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to the case.

Over the past three months, I gained extensive experience throughout ex-offender law. In the arena of expungement and sealing, I was able to get experience in all phases of the case. I researched eligibility issues for clients for whom I eventually drafted petitions. I advocated for pro se litigants at their expungement and sealing hearings, including making several eligibility arguments that required statutory interpretation and gathering evidence about the history and disposition of a case. For one unlucky client whose order somehow got lost in the shuffle, I contacted the Illinois State Police and worked with them to make sure the records were properly sealed. For another client whose healthcare waiver application had been denied, I helped prepare an appeal.

The most rewarding ex-offender work I did this summer was preparing a clemency petition for a guy named George (not his real name). George grew up on the south side of Chicago and during his youth dealt drugs to support his older sister and himself. His mom had a drug problem and his dad wasn't around, so in high school George started dealing drugs because he saw how

much money his friends were making. After only a few months in the game, he got arrested. His felony conviction isn't sealable under current Illinois law, so George needs executive clemency to clear his record. Since his conviction, he's turned his life completely around. He's found religion and is active in his church. He has four kids he loves dearly and of whom he is incredibly proud. He coaches his son's football team and helps keep kids off the street by employing them in the barbershop where he works. On top of his two part-time jobs, George is in school full-time working on getting his bachelor's degree.

Working with George on his clemency petition was a challenging and rewarding experience. It was hard to get George to remember details of cases that happened twenty years ago, but getting him to remember stuff from when he was just a kid was even tougher. Writing and crafting that material into a narrative for the Governor was difficult, but it was ultimately less a challenge than a pleasure because George is a really fantastic guy whose case I really believe in.

This summer at Chicago Legal Clinic was incredibly educational. I was able to take substantial steps toward mastering two areas of law, and I was able to do it while helping clients who needed it most. The experience could not have happened without funding from Equal Justice America, and for that I am very thankful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ken Stalkfleet".

Ken Stalkfleet

The University of Chicago Law School – 2014