

To: Dan Ruben, Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

From: Kimberly M. Adams /s

Subject: Final Summer Internship Report

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My summer experience at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland changed my perspective of the law and its influence on public policy. Working in the area of Community Development shifted my focus from litigation to collaborative lawyering, advocacy, and public policy. Many times, our clients think that the only way they will get positive outcome is through litigation because, at the end of the day, that is what is seen most on television. As law students, unless we are careful and expand our horizons to the alternatives, we can be sucked into this false belief as well. I am now convinced that whatever legal path I decide to take after graduation, I will not be one to focus on litigation to get the best outcome for my clients. My toolbox has been expanded in a way that will now allow me to seek other avenues to assist low-income individuals and communities seeking to improve their lives and strengthen their surroundings.

My project with LASCLEV dealt with examining the reentry movement in their service area, compiling data on practice areas that are involved in reentry, and finally determining where LASCLEV can best allocate additional resources and services in reentry. In Ohio, the majority of individuals leaving incarceration come back to the Cuyahoga County/Cleveland Metro area to live. Just out of prison or jail, people are concerned about where they are going to live, how to make a living, and

how not to go back to incarceration. Many people fail at the third objective because they do not have the tools, motivation, and/or support to accomplish the first two elements. Around 2005, the City of Cleveland started looking at the reentry problem facing their returning citizens and communities and began building a collective strategy with community stakeholders, local government, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, and legal services providers. They focused on areas like housing, employment, transportation, support services and the like. A strong foundation was built and, in 2010, the efforts we shifted countywide and now, the Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry handles all of these issues. Even though the Housing Group of LASCLEV actively participated in the Housing activities of the Office of reentry, no other practice groups had formal involvement.

I was able to compile a report and present my findings to a meeting of all of the practice groups and it was a success for the most part. In all things new to an organization, there is some resistance to compile efforts into one strategy that will still give people their own unique area to work in but, to bring others up to speed and enhance the offerings that can contribute to the legal services commitment to the reentry community. The Housing Group is still the standard bearer in the organization and community but, with positive steps taken by current legislation in the area of lessening collateral sanctions for restored citizens, LASCLEV can definitely be a leader in legal services delivery in the areas dealing with barriers to employment, wage and hour issues, and sealing of records. Their Social Work group could also have a unique opportunity to assist in helping restored offenders gain access to support services as well.

As my law school career comes to a close next May, I have been blessed with various opportunities for exposure to many aspects of public interest law but I am most gratified by my experience with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. My supervisor, Anne Sweeny is not only an exceptional attorney and advocate; she is a great teacher and motivator. She gave me the latitude to more or less design my own project and see it through to completion. Her compassion and commitment to excellence has inspired me to use the skills gained this summer to compete for post graduated legal fellowships offered by Equal Justice Works and the Skadden Foundation. I would have never been prepared to tackle this type of competition if it had not been for her trust in me to do the work assigned in a timely and professional matter always keeping in mind the goals of the organization but, not stifling my professional growth.

Finally, I am indebted to Equal Justice America for sponsoring my public interest work this summer. Your financial support allowed me to have another great experience and I am humbly appreciative for your support and your commitment to students like me that desire to pursue public interest law careers but may not have the financial means to do so. Thank you again Equal Justice America and continued success and blessings to your organization.