

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America

August 10, 2017

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to you to discuss my recent EJA Fellowship experience this summer, while I was working as a summer intern with the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, or LAF. While at LAF, I worked within the housing practice group, which focuses on eviction defense for indigent tenants that receive some sort of government housing subsidy (e.g. Public Housing residents, Section 8 Voucher recipients). On a weekly basis, we would interview 5-7 potential clients to learn about their potential cases, which would then be pitched to the larger group at weekly case acceptance meetings. Because of our limited resources, we would typically only be able to offer brief services to the majority of our clients, while agreeing to fully represent only a small portion of the group. After a case was accepted, and if my supervisory attorney was assigned to that case, I would meet with him to begin discussing negotiation and trial strategy; soon writing motions and engaging in discovery in preparation for trial.

Our clients were typically female heads of households that were living under the federal poverty level. They ranged from their late teens to their early 70s, were typically women of color, and almost all of them had minor children living with them in their household. Oftentimes cases would come down to non-payment of rent, and we would interview our clients to learn why the rent had not been paid. Many of our clients said that because their residences were uninhabitable (e.g. infested with pests, lack of utilities, landlord retaliation), they voluntarily withheld their rent payments accordingly. Other times our clients would be forced out for cause, meaning they, or a member of their household, engaged in certain activity that was prohibited either by their lease or relevant federal regulations.

One client in particular had come to LAF because she was being threatened of eviction by her landlord for complaining to her town about poor housing quality (infestations and electric wiring issues). After we first learned of her case, we found out that the landlord had recently been awarded an order for possession by default, meaning that the tenant had failed to report to the trial hearing. When asked about the order of possession, the tenant maintained that she had never been notified that a case had been filed against her. After looking over the court file, we noticed that there was no evidence provided by the landlord that the tenant had (1) been given notice, and (2) had received a summons to court

(both of which are mandatory). Because of this improper service of process, we were able to present a motion in court to quash service and vacate the judgment, and the judge granted both motions. In the aftermath, we were able to negotiate a move-out date with opposing counsel, which allowed our tenant to retain her entire security deposit and to keep her housing voucher. Without our work, she would have faced mandatory termination of her voucher due to the eviction recorded against her. She now has a new home, where her and her three children live comfortably and affordably.

In a separate case, we worked with a tenant to file an affirmative action against her landlord for retaliation. Our client had been living in a private home on a Section 8 voucher for about 5 years, but recently, after heavy rainfall the basement would flood with sewage. After complaining to her landlord to no avail, she notified the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, the federal agency in charge of enforcing housing quality standards in the Section 8 program. After the house failed HUD's emergency inspection, the landlord appeared at the property, and severed the electric wire that connected the home to electricity. Without other options, our client was forced to live in this home with her two children for over a month before she called our organization to ask about her legal rights. We agreed to take her case, and an attorney tasked me with writing a complaint, seeking both specific performance and money damages. The court issued an immediate order against the landlord to repair the electricity, leaving six more counts for further deliberation in the coming weeks (including violating the RPUSA and RLTO, as well as other consumer fraud related claims and emotional distress). LAF is hopeful that our client will receive the damages she deserves, and that the landlord will be permanently barred from the HUD Section 8 program.

All in all, it was a terrific experience. I was able to develop as a legal writer, and engage in various research projects, all while being a member of a team of dynamic, purposeful and driven attorneys. It was a pleasure to spend my summer at LAF, and I am grateful to Equal Justice America for supporting my work. I look forward to being a part of EJA for years to come.

Sincerely,

Brian Gibbons
Loyola University Chicago School of Law
Class of 2019

September 26, 2017

Katie Toman, Office Manager
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Re: Brian Gibbons, Equal Justice America Summer 2017 Fellow

Dear Ms. Toman:

It is a pleasure to write this letter evaluating Brian Gibbons' Equal Justice America fellowship. This summer, Brian worked at LAF. LAF is the largest provider of free civil legal representation in Cook County, Illinois. During his time at LAF, Brian worked in the Housing Practice Group advocating for tenants living in subsidized housing. I am a senior attorney in the Housing Practice Group and directly supervised Brian's work.

I can say that Brian is one of the brightest law students I have supervised. Brian is insightful, eager to lend a helping hand, and even more eager to learn. Because he had only completed one year of law school, Brian primarily undertook legal research and writing assignments. He is a quick learner who, with relatively little training, competently drafted pleadings, discovery requests and responses. Brian also showed great legal instinct in spotting issues while reviewing discovery responses from opposing parties.

Brian also worked with clients in every stage of the eviction process conducting intake interviews, applying for grants on behalf of clients, investigating claims, assessing the credibility of potential clients and witnesses, and making recommendations on whether a case warranted LAF's involvement. Brian was always thoughtful and insightful when considering cases and asked well thought out questions. Brian also showed a commitment to the community we served by advocating for LAF's involvement, at times swaying our decision to become involved, when our initial instinct was to not.

Because of his commitment to every task to which he was assigned, and his remarkable speed in grasping concepts and completing assignments, I could not detail all of the work Brian completed this summer on behalf of our clients. If I did, I would only repeat myself as I describe his commitment, passion, timeliness, accuracy and creativity, all of which shone through in everything Brian undertook.

Brian also worked for other attorneys in the Housing Practice Group. They all echo the sentiment that Brian stood out among the many law students who have worked at LAF. Not just his contemporaries, but also those who were here before him. EJA's sponsorship of Brian's work at LAF this summer is a great example of extending legal services with resources that otherwise would be unavailable and investing in a future attorney who will continue to contribute to seeking justice for low income individuals. Brian was an invaluable asset to LAF's housing practice group and we really felt the void when he left. We hope to work with him again, either as a student or a practitioner.

Brian is a great advocate and exhibited great maturity and compassion for others. Working with him was a pleasure. Thank you for making that possible. Please contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



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