

August 31, 2012

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

Re: Summer 2012 Equal Justice America Evaluation

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am not sure that I will ever be able to express what my experience at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago this summer has meant to me. I have always known that I wanted to be involved in public interest law, but my work at LAF further solidified that desire. The work that these passionate attorneys do every day to ensure that all people have the opportunity to attain justice is inspiring. I was honored to be a part of it.

This summer, I worked in the Children and Families Practice Group, specifically in Education Law. One case that stands out and serves as a reminder of the power that advocates have involved a fourth grade boy at a Chicago charter school. His guardian contacted LAF because she had tried multiple times to have his school evaluate him for special education services. The school consistently refused to evaluate him for services. As such, I drafted a letter requesting that he be assessed and sent this to the district. The district ultimately agreed to evaluate him for special education services during summer assessment, found him eligible for services, and developed an IEP for him. I also drafted a letter requesting that he be provided with compensatory education services for the time that he was placed in an inappropriate educational setting despite his guardian's requests that he be evaluated. Working with this client opened my eyes to the power that I have as an advocate. Not only was I able to ensure that this student received the services he needed in order to receive an appropriate education, but I was able to change his educational trajectory through one simple letter. I will never forget this student and the work that I had the privilege of doing on his behalf.

I am also immensely grateful for the supervision that I received at LAF. My supervisor always took the time to explain tasks and the overall importance of these tasks. I am inspired by the compassion that she has for clients and the relentless work that she does on their behalf in her quest to ensure that all people have the opportunity to attain justice. She is a large part of the reason that I have decided to stay at LAF in the fall as an extern. I feel honored to have the opportunity to learn from her as I strive to be the best advocate possible for my clients.

Thank you so very much to both LAF and Equal Justice America for providing me with this opportunity. I am so looking forward to continuing my professional life in service to others.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Knittle', with a stylized, flowing script.

Laura Knittle

Loyola University Chicago School of Law, May 2013



Equal justice starts here.

August 20, 2012

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
Sent via e-mail to katie@equaljusticeamerica.org

RE: Laura Knittle
Loyola University Chicago School of Law

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Over the course of the summer, I had the great pleasure of supervising Laura Knittle, a law student intern from Loyola University Chicago School of Law who worked at LAF through the generosity of Equal Justice America. Laura was an outstanding addition to our summer staff, and we have arranged for her to continue working here 2 days a week during the fall semester. I would use three adjectives to describe Laura: smart, organized and cheerful, all of which I explain in detail below.

Laura was assigned to work with LAF's education law team. Within the past six months, the team has lost two staff attorneys and a paralegal. Needless to say, we had a lot of work for Laura to do. She drafted two lengthy demand letters to our local school district on behalf of children in need of special education services. In one case, the letter resulted in the district agreeing to evaluate the child for special ed eligibility. Laura then attended two meetings with the school special ed team, during which the child was found eligible for special ed services in math and will now receive social work at school. In another case, Laura sent a demand letter on behalf of two brothers, seeking extended school year (ESY) services. The brothers had gotten this as part of their special education plan in the past but, inexplicably, the district refused to offer it to them this summer. The boys' mother was afraid they would regress educationally since both boys have severe learning disabilities. Laura's letter persuaded the district to modify the boys' special ed plans and continue ESY services.

In a more complex matter, Laura drafted a due process complaint for a child expelled from a Chicago Charter School. This case involved a host of legal issues. The student had previously been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and his mother had repeatedly requested that the school evaluate him for special ed services. The school refused and, ultimately, he was expelled for shouting out in class. In order to draft the complaint, Laura needed to understand the federal regulations governing IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as well as the Illinois School Code. Her draft of the complaint was excellent. Afterwards, Laura conducted research on the issue of Charter School expulsions. This is a relatively new area of law. We will use this case and Laura's research to push the issue of,

“What kind of process is due to a child expelled from a Charter School when Charter Schools are publicly funded but children do not have an entitlement or state constitutional right to attend them?”

Finally, our office has a case of first impression pending before the Illinois Appellate Court involving the equitable doctrine of statutory tolling. We are seeking to toll the statute of limitations on behalf of an adult child who reasonably believed her father was dead and did not discover his existence until she was 21 years-old, a year past her 20th birthday when the statute of limitations expires for children seeking a parentage order. Laura conducted research in that case, and we ultimately used two cases she found in our opening appellate court briefs. Overall, Laura has an excellent ability to grasp complex legal matters and she works very efficiently on all tasks assigned to her.

Since Laura obtained her 711 license, she was also able to cover uncontested court calls for me. While this did not involve anything complex, it was a great help to the office.

Laura also spent hours helping me sort through pages of medical bills for a divorce client, and she created a chart that organizes all of the unpaid bills. This chart will be used to help divide the debt in a divorce case. Laura also helped me organize another divorce case by sorting through the adult child's college expenses. I will use that chart in my motion seeking contribution toward the college expenses by the non-custodial parent. It should be noted that the client in the second divorce case is disorganized, so Laura spent hours interviewing the client and sorting through paperwork. Again, her ability to gather all the necessary information and compile it in an organized and thorough way was extremely helpful to me.

In addition, there were dozens of small tasks that I threw at Laura (phone calls, mailings, copying, investigating, etc.); she always seemed organized and followed-up with me on a daily basis about the status of her assignments. Laura is conscientious and hard-working.

Best of all, Laura always appears thrilled to be at work. She exudes cheerfulness both in person and through her e-mail correspondence. She is truly a pleasure to have in the office. In fact, I assigned Laura some of my most difficult clients because they actually remained calm with her and loved hearing from her.

As stated above, we have arranged for Laura to continue working here two days a week during the school year and I think that, in and of itself, shows what we thought of her work. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Jennifer J. Payne

Supervisory Attorney