

August 13, 2010

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

Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank Equal Justice America and all of its supporters for awarding me a fellowship for the summer of 2010. With the support of the fellowship I was able to spend my summer at Legal Services of Northern Virginia, working to help low income residents of Fairfax County, Virginia. This was a particularly special opportunity for me as I spent most of my childhood growing up in Fairfax County.

One of the strengths of LSNV is that they work in many different areas of the law. During my summer at LSNV I was able to learn about several issues that low income residents face within housing law, family law and consumer law. Throughout the summer I was able to speak with clients and do research and trial preparation for victims of domestic violence who were seeking protective orders, I did research to help clients facing the foreclosure of their home, and I spoke with clients who were burdened with consumer debt.

The clients that had the greatest impact on me were the women seeking protective orders due to incidents of domestic violence. Most clients had suffered physically abused. All were emotionally and verbally abused. Some were abused in front of their children and others had been suffering at the hands of their abuser for years. They all told stories about the ways their abuser would try to control them. Some abusers used their fists, others threatened to take away their children or have them deported. The common thread among these women was that they had decided that they needed to protect themselves and their children. It was often difficult for them to speak about their experiences – one client said she felt ashamed about what had happened to her. I admired their courage to stand up for themselves and say that enough was enough. There are no easy answers to many of these cases, but these women taught me more than they can imagine.

Speaking with both clients and attorneys throughout the summer, I was able to see another side of the law – the personal side. I gained a wealth of knowledge watching the organization's attorneys and clients going through the legal system. I have always firmly believed that hands on experience greatly enhances any academic experience. I am certain that what I learned this summer will not only help me be a better student, but a more dedicated public servant in my career.

Thank you again.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a long horizontal stroke that curves upwards and then downwards, ending in a small loop.

Mariana Elias
George Mason University School of Law - 2012