

August 13, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a rising second-year student at the University of Chicago. A 2013 Law Student Fellowship made my summer internship with the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law possible. The Shriver Center, located in Chicago, IL, provides national leadership in advancing laws and policies that secure justice to improve the lives and opportunities of people living in poverty. I am most appreciative to EJA and the Law Student Fellowship Program for providing the financial support to make this internship a reality.

The Shriver Center staff and advocates are incredibly welcoming and wonderful teachers. I had the opportunity to work with many advocates in different areas. The wide variety of issues affecting individuals in poverty and near poverty requires the Shriver Center to focus its efforts on a wide scope of areas, which allowed me to learn much about many different policy needs. The bulk of my work focused on Housing Justice, Economic Opportunity and Security, Public Benefits, and Community Justice. I had three main types of work: researching policy issues, researching case law for impact litigation, and providing direct services.

I spent the majority of my time researching and writing, so the advocates were better informed and prepared to advocate for policies and legislation that would better support those living in poverty and near-poverty conditions. One major area of my policy research involved the Illinois SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) program. As evidenced by the recent Farm Bill debates, SNAP is the focus of much attention. I researched proposed changes and legislative history, drafted a series of policy memoranda, and provided strategic input during task force meetings. I also researched and drafted a comment letter regarding possible changes to and expansion of the Military Lending Act. For impact litigation matters, I drafted memoranda of law on the Fair Housing Act and class action developments.

I also provided direct services in the way of intake for clients who needed assistance dealing with their criminal record. Most of the client matters concentrate on filing petitions for a Certificate of Good Conduct, which greatly assists the client in securing gainful employment. These are fairly routine filings, but involve a great deal of conversation with the client to truly understand his or her history and current life style. A strong petition usually has up to a dozen exhibits, including certificates from completed trainings, a resume, and letters of support.

I, however, worked with a gentleman who hoped to get early parole based on demonstrated good behavior, dedication to the community, and encouragement of his eligibility from a past parole officer. This was a type of filing that the attorney I worked with had not done before, so it

required more research and creativity on my part. The statute regulating early parole leaves much discretion to the Prison Review Board to determine if, and when, early parole is appropriate. This meant I had to actively demonstrate why the client's good conduct and community work while on parole qualify him for early parole.

At this point I have completed a draft petition and am waiting for the client to gather the necessary letters of support and revise his resume to reflect his current employment and community activities. It will likely be a lengthy process to gather the needed exhibits and get a hearing before the Prison Review Board. I hope to continue working on this case with my supervising attorney after my internship formally ends. So far, the working with this client has been incredibly rewarding. Although it is challenging to reconcile how much his felony charges have impacted all aspects of his life, it is gratifying to know that the Shriver Center's work is empowering individuals who are demonstrating that they are a reformed individual and actively contributing members of society.

Throughout the summer, I worked with incredibly intelligent and dedicated advocates who involved me in all aspects of their work and enabled me to do background research, attend meetings, contribute to policy discussions, do ongoing follow-up research, and generally be actively engaged at all levels of the policy process.

I know the many opportunities at Shriver that will continue to benefit me as I move forward in my legal career. In addition to my professional network expansion and research and writing improvement, I have benefited personally from my internship. I now have a better understanding of a larger area of policy areas and the types of questions to ask when faced with a new issue. Additionally, the opportunity to do client intake with past offenders was notable, especially in light of the growing discussion concerning the criminal justice system. These experiences will play a major role as I continue shaping my legal career.

None of this would have been possible without the assistance of EJA. I am truly grateful for this incredible program and all of EJA's generous donors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mikaela Shaw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mikaela Shaw
University of Chicago Law School
J.D. Candidate, Class of 2015