

# PATRICK O'NEILL

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October 16, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a third year student at the University of Wisconsin Law School, and through the generosity of the Equal Justice America Fellowship Program, I had the opportunity to intern this summer at the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center in Denver, Colorado. As an intern at the Children's Law Center, I served as the guardian ad litem for children involved in civil protection order cases, and assisted with the representation of abused and neglected youth who were involved in open Colorado Department of Human Services cases. My work over the summer included drafting appeals, writing motions, preparing memos, interviewing clients and other involved parties, conducting investigations, submitting court reports, negotiating settlements, and attending cross-disciplinary team meetings.

One of the children I served this summer, Michael (not his actual name), made a lasting impression on me. Michael, who was originally from East Africa and had been adopted at a young age, was 12 years old and had recently finished sixth grade. On the final day of the school year, Michael told a teacher that he would rather die than spend the summer at home with his mother because his mother would frequently hit him, yell at him, call him her slave, and treat him much worse than his other three siblings, all of whom were also adopted. The teacher remembered seeing marks on Michael in the past, and decided to call the local department of human services. A social worker ended up coming to the school, taking Michael to the hospital, and opening up an investigation into Michael's family. After a few days at the hospital, Michael was discharged to his aunt, whom he lived with for the summer.

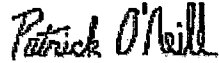
Over the course of the summer, I had the opportunity to work with the guardian ad litem and the social worker from the Children's Law Center who were assigned to Michael's case. I met with Michael and his aunt at her house, I met with Michael's parents and siblings at their house, and I attended Michael's court hearings. Throughout the course of all this, which was only the beginning of what is likely to be a long and tiring case process, I was constantly amazed by Michael's resilience, maturity, and positive attitude. Despite the pain and suffering that Michael had endured at the hands of his own mother, he remained incredibly upbeat and unfazed. Not only was Michael remarkably smart – he would frequently grill me about topics as diverse as astrophysics, federal monetary policy, or world history – but he loved to share typical child stories from his adventures in the woods next to his aunt's house, or his epic neighborhood-wide game of capture the flag.

Michael's case was still in the initial phases when my internship ended, but the ultimate goal was for Michael to be adopted by his aunt, and to ensure that his siblings remained safe,

wherever they were placed. No matter what happens, I am confident that Michael will stay the curious, happy, and brilliant child that he was this summer.

Michael is just one example of the many amazing children that I got to know and help this summer. I was constantly amazed by how resilient the kids were, how capable they were at overcoming situations nobody should ever have to face, and how eager and willing they were to forgive. Over the course of the summer, I got to know an incredible group of attorneys, social workers, and clients. My internship at the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center not only taught me a lot of substantive knowledge about child welfare law and about the ability of the courts to improve people's lives, but more importantly, I learned about the human capability to endure.

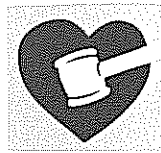
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick O'Neill". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Patrick O'Neill

University of Wisconsin Law School

J.D. Candidate, December 2013



ROCKY MOUNTAIN

children's  
law center

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

Re: Patrick O'Neill, EJA Summer Fellow 2013

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center had the pleasure of hosting Patrick O'Neill as a student intern with our office. I supervised Mr. O'Neill, along with a couple of other attorneys, during his time with us. The mission of Children's Law Center is to transform the lives of abused, neglected and at-risk children through compassionate legal advocacy, education and public policy reform. Mr. O'Neill was a welcome addition to these efforts over the summer months.

From day one, Mr. O'Neill was eager to delve into the work. He asked thoughtful questions and sought out opportunities to observe our attorneys in practice. As the summer progressed, our initial impressions of Mr. O'Neill were further confirmed through his hard work and dedication.

Mr. O'Neill was assigned a variety of projects during his internship, such as assisting attorneys with motions, observing court proceedings, and interacting with our youth during visits and meetings. Perhaps, most significantly, he conducted substantial research on jury selection in dependency cases and drafted an appellate argument that was used in our office's response brief to the Colorado Court of Appeals. Mr. O'Neill also strategized with office attorneys and identified key case law in preparation for appellate argument. Throughout this process, Mr. O'Neill asked questions and sought assistance as appropriate, but also demonstrated initiative. He came to meetings with attorneys in our office prepared and well-versed in the research. There were no concerns regarding his work ethic or the quality of his product.

The research that Mr. O'Neill performed not only served our child clients in those individual cases, but also furthered our office's attempts to make larger systemic change in the child welfare context. Based on Mr. O'Neill's solid reasoning, we were able to remind the court of the existing law in these areas, but also demonstrate the recurring issues of applying law to practice. A nonprofit such as the Children's Law Center simply does not have the time and resources to dedicate to this sort of in-depth analysis without the benefit of students like Mr. O'Neill.

I have heard numerous compliments from the Children's Law Center staff regarding their interactions with Mr. O'Neill this summer. One attorney in particular sent me several emails regarding Mr. O'Neill's "solid" work product. We were lucky to have him join us and are

grateful that Equal Justice America provided such an opportunity. If you have any additional questions regarding Mr. O'Neill or his performance over the course of the summer, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betsy Fordyce", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Betsy Fordyce  
DU Law Child Advocacy Practicum Director  
Director of Appellate Advocacy