

August 31, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My experience at Housing Works, Inc., was an amazing one. I learned so much about direct client services, landlord-tenant law and myself. Housing Works, Inc., is a non-profit organization geared towards assisting people living with HIV/AIDS in the community by making sure they have access to adequate housing, healthcare, and support services. Moreover, Housing Works, Inc., is unique in that there is a separate legal department there to aid clients who come in with myriad of legal concerns that may include housing, estate, family, or civil rights issues.

Over the ten weeks, I staffed their legal clinics, learned how to draft an order to show cause, worked on name change petitions, filed motions, and did research on different legal topics such as the available injunctive relief options that could be used to force the delivery of a rental lease agreement. However, the beginning of the summer started with a several visits to civil, housing, and federal court, where I had the opportunity to observe the attorneys make oral arguments and represent various Housing Works clients.

It was on one of these trips that I went to the Harlem Community Justice Center, and I met Melina Sanchez,* a Housing Works client who was facing eviction from her apartment. I showed up to court early that, and I found Ms. Sanchez waiting and she began to tell me her story. It was then that I realized that like many other Housing Works clients, a set of unforeseen circumstances sent her life spiraling out of control. And she was now dealing with the reality that she may have to leave the apartment where she spent that last 26 years of her life. She had been laid off in 2008, and she was using her unemployment as well as her savings to pay the monthly rent consistently, but soon there after the building where she lived was sold to another holding company. When the new proprietors took ownership, they began destabilizing some of the rental units. Ms. Sanchez knew that this would mean an increase of rent, which she just could not afford. Sure enough, they raised her rent about two hundred dollars, and around that time, in 2010, her unemployment benefits ran out. Ms. Sanchez could no longer afford to pay her rent.

Fast-forward to 2013, after fighting with HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA), Ms. Sanchez was able to get her rent paid through a rental subsidy provided to those living in the community with HIV/AIDS. However, Ms. Sanchez was already in rent arrears for approximately \$22,000. A marshal's notice had already been issued and a date for eviction was set. I had come to observe the Housing Works attorney argue her order to show cause in front of the judge, which previous discussions with the attorney revealed there was a slim to none chance that the eviction would be stayed by the judge. Somehow, instead of going in front of the judge the attorney was able to negotiate with the landlord's attorney to suspend the eviction for one month, which in turn gives Ms. Sanchez time to come up with the money to pay the rent arrears. Over the next few weeks, I watched as the attorney worked tirelessly with Ms. Sanchez to secure funding and donations. In the end, they were able to come up with close to \$11,000, half of the rent arrears, from different church organizations and other private donors.

I tell this story because I learned several key things from that experience. When representing a client you need to prepare vigorously for not only the positive outcomes, but for the worst possible outcomes. You need to understand how a particular court in that particular jurisdiction works and you need to use that to your advantage in the representation of your client. Harlem Community Justice Center uses a different legal model to service community residents and one of their goals is eviction prevention. This is mainly the reason the attorney was able to negotiate with the landlord's attorney, rather than present her order to show cause. There was no way the attorney was going to make the entire balance of the rent arrears go away, but she did manage to bring the amount owed down through very effective negotiation tactics. In addition, I learned that as an attorney you need to manage your client's expectations. You have to communicate clearly to the client what you need from them, so you can work together towards the best possible resolution.

Without the Equal Justice America Fellowship, I would not have been able to do this internship. I am grateful for the funding you provided to me and continue to provide to students like me who hope to pursue careers in the public interest sector. I am also thankful to the attorney's at Housing Works who made sure that this summer was a hands-on, educational experience. Doing this internship has reinforced my commitment to work in public interest. I want to be able to provide legal services to needy low-income families in the community who have the most to gain from legal advocacy.

Sincerely,

Sabine Rospide

New York Law School, Class of 2014



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July 31, 2013

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Re: Evaluation of Ms. Sabine Rospide

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to offer my extremely positive evaluation of Ms. Sabine Rospide, a summer intern at Housing Works very kindly sponsored by Equal Justice America. By way of background, I am the Senior Staff Attorney at Housing Works, Inc., the largest provider of social services for persons living with HIV and AIDS in New York State. I am responsible for bringing “impact” civil rights litigation on behalf of our clients on issues that include homelessness, welfare, and disability and gender discrimination. In addition, I supervise the attorneys who provide individual legal services to our clients.

Ms. Rospide was selected as one of two outstanding candidates for summer internship from a pool of over 250 applicants. As an intern here at Housing Works, Ms. Rospide conducted intake interviews with clients in locations throughout the boroughs of New York, several times a week, all summer long. This is no easy task. Housing Works clients present great challenges to the legal interviewer: in addition to living with a mortal illness, many are past or present drug users, quite often with criminal histories, and they are usually struggling with additional stigmas and the stress of homelessness and poverty. Often, these clients come to us with urgent problems, from impending evictions to termination of public assistance benefits. Ms. Rospide handled these intakes with aplomb, with good humor, patience, and fine judgment, working with our Staff Attorneys to follow up on the most pressing and difficult cases.

Ms. Rospide also completed key research projects over the course of the summer, including important work on the rights of a tenant who had signed a lease only to find that his landlord denied him possession on homophobic and AIDS-phobic grounds. Our attorneys incorporated her research into a successful motion for a temporary restraining order, with a motion for a preliminary and permanent injunction currently pending.

Ms. Rospide is an enthusiastic learner and took advantage of every opportunity to follow attorneys to court and ask important questions. She is intelligent, hardworking, and dependable. She also possesses a sense of humor, humility, and kindness that endear her to her colleagues.

My Staff Attorneys report that she is conscientious and thorough, exercises good judgment, has a terrific demeanor, and is very easy to work with. We have thoroughly enjoyed working with her this summer, and are ever so grateful for your sponsorship.

I wish Ms. Rospide all the best in her future endeavors and have no doubt she will make a stellar attorney.

Sincerely,

/s/

Armen H. Merjian, Esq.