

September 9, 2008

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank Equal Justice America for giving me the opportunity to work at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago by awarding me a Law Student Fellowship for the summer of 2008.

At LAF, I was given the opportunity to work on cases at all stages of legal aid process, right from the initial intake interview all the way through discovery and trial. I worked on all sorts of different kinds of cases including divorce, custody, immigration, eviction, credit collection, public aid, foreclosures, car repossessions, and more. I did intake interviews and attended case acceptance meetings to make the initial decisions about whether or not we would take a case. I drafted divorce petitions, discovery responses and requests, and pleadings during the court process. I spoke with clients to let them know how their cases were going and met with them to get the information necessary for petitions and affidavits. I went with attorneys to court to follow the status of client's cases. I saw depositions and wrote abstracts. I did legal research and writing to support motions. It was a great experience which really threw me fully in to the litigation process in a way that law school only barely began to prepare me for.

During the summer I worked on one case in particular that was very inspirational for me. I worked on one divorce case for a client who had suffered severe emotional and physical abuse from her husband. She was an undocumented immigrant who was scared

to leave her husband for fear she would be deported. I helped her file for divorce and apply for legal status in the United States through the Violence Against Women Act. Thanks to our work, she would be able to gain permanent residency. Over the weeks I worked with her I saw her grow more confident and cheerful as she saw her future open up. Now she is going back to school and seems committed to taking charge of her life.

Other cases also stand out in my mind. I helped two families stay in their apartments and keep their housing subsidies when they were at risk of becoming homeless. I helped a mother file a divorce petition against a husband who had sexually assault their young child. I helped a disabled woman fight an SSI termination based on a mistake of identity. Several other cases I worked on will still continue on even after I leave LAF, but I can leave confident that I made a difference and helped do what I could to assist the clients. All too many times unscrupulous landlords, employees, creditors, and other entities try to take advantage of those who are less educated, less well-off, and less able to fend for themselves. This is why the work we do at LAF is so important; it allows these individuals to stand up for a change. I found my experiences at LAF challenging at times, but rewarding much more often than not. I leave this summer much more committed to a career in public service than ever before.

Sincerely,

Samira Nazem
University of Chicago