

August 31, 2009

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 awarding me a Law Student Summer Fellowship. The Fellowship allowed me the wonderful opportunity to work at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF) in their downtown office. As an intern at LAF, I was involved with clients throughout the various stages of their cases. I worked on a variety of legal issues facing some of Chicago's poorest citizens, including: eviction, divorce, custody, domestic violence, public benefits, and unemployment. My experience gave me a great introduction to the litigation process and has taught me vital skills necessary for being a great lawyer that I could never learn in a classroom at the law school.

I conducted intake interviews to identify the legal issue facing potential clients and presented their stories at case acceptance meetings. At these meetings, we made decision about whether or not we would take on the case and the type of legal services we would provide if we decided to take the case. I also drafted divorce and custody petitions, marital settlement agreements, parenting agreements, motions to dismiss in eviction cases, and a brief in support of an appeal to an unemployment benefit denial. I conducted legal research and wrote memoranda in support of motions and briefs I worked on. I spoke with clients to investigate their cases further and met with them to get information needed to draft petitions and affidavits. I also observed attorneys in court.

One of the cases I particularly I enjoyed working on involved a client who was at risk of eviction from her public housing unit. Our client lost her job in December and applied to have

her rent reduced through recertification with the public housing authority. The recertification never happened and our client fell behind on her payments, so her landlord sought to evict her for failure to pay rent. I became extremely connected to this client and her case because I had the chance to work on her case in a variety of capacities. I conducted legal research to enable me to write a response to a petition for use and occupancy as well as a motion to dismiss the case based on the argument that by holding payments for two months the landlord waived his right to pursue an eviction. I also met with the client to draft an affidavit in support of the response and motion. I went to court on two occasions and observed the attorney on the case workout agreements with the opposing counsel to allow our client to remain in her unit and stall the proceedings while we waited for the housing authority to process the recertification. Ultimately, the housing authority agreed to recertify our client back to when she initially filed and issued her moving papers so she could leave her unit.

My experience at LAF has helped me to understand the role of attorneys as advocates for people who are often voiceless, unheard, ignored and forgotten in our society. Often time the work I did at LAF was as simple as making a phone call or writing an email, but meant a great deal to the client I was representing. The knowledge I gain in the classroom and “practicing” in the real world helps me to be a more informed, persuasive and dedicated advocate. My experience at LAF has been insightful and strengthened my commitment to serve marginalized and underrepresented individuals in a career in public service after I graduate. For this reason, I am truly appreciative for receiving an Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship.

Sincerely,

Shareese Pryor
Candidate for Juris Doctor 2011
The University of Chicago Law School