

September 10, 2010

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am truly thankful to Equal Justice America for awarding me a Legal Services Summer Fellowship. The Fellowship helped fund my summer employment in the Office of the Cook County Public Guardian's Juvenile Division. As a 711 Law Clerk with the OPG, I spent three days each week working on trial-level cases providing direct representation. The remaining two days I enhanced my legal research, analysis and writing skills with the Appeals Unit. Splitting my time gave me exposure to a wide variety of child welfare law issues and a chance to complete varied assignments.

While working on trial level cases, I worked with clients in varying stages of the child protection proceedings. My experience gave me a great introduction to trial advocacy and has taught me vital skills necessary for working with child clients that will benefit me in my career. I stood up in court as a 711 Law Clerk in permanency and status hearings on behalf of minor clients. In these hearings, the parties involved ask the child's social work and any other child welfare professionals involved in the case questions about the child, parents and foster parents' progress and services. In preparation for hearings, I reviewed case file and prepared case histories to help attorney determine plan of action for court. I also contacted child welfare professionals to get status on placement, visits and services. I also did some writing, preparing written orders after court hearings and drafting Motions to Extend Wardship.

With the Appeals Unit, I wrote memoranda of law on several issues, including: the meaning of the probable cause standard of proof at temporary custody hearings, parental preference in best interest hearings and appellate jurisdiction over orders versus injunctions. I also revised a case preparation form to include services and challenges faced by clients with mental health needs, which will be used by the Public Guardian's Office in the future.

The stories of teenage clients impacted me the most. This was not because their stories seemed

anymore gruesome or egregious than those of the younger clients. This group most affected me because very shortly they will face the world as adults without the support of the foster care system, an attorney dedicated to advocating for them, and, for many, without any other supports. Many of my teenage clients had children, struggled to further their education or find employment, were involved in the criminal system and/or lacked the capacity to advocate for themselves. With younger clients, there's still a hope that some interventions can happen that will lead them on to a successful path. But, some of my older clients seemed to be scrambling to get things together before they aged out of the system or completely apathetic to their lack of achievement. The question that grappled me during my internship, I continue to ask myself now and hope to help answer as a future attorney is: How do we not only protect children while they are in foster care, but also give them the skills, motivation, support and opportunities needed to ensure they function as successful and independent adults?

I came to law school committed to developing a public interest career serving disadvantaged children. I began my summer at the OPG with some reservations about working with abused and neglected children, fearing that I might become too emotionally overwhelmed to do this type of work. My summer experience quashed all my fears and doubts. I absolutely loved working in this area of the law. I felt fulfilled and strongly believe that this population particularly needs great legal representation. I left the internship with a variety of practical skills, including courtroom experience and a greater understanding of the specific challenges of navigating vulnerable children through the legal system. For me, this was the internship of my dreams! I cannot express in writing how grateful I am for receiving an Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship to help fund my summer experience.

Sincerely,

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



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Sept. 14, 2010

Dan Ruben
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RE: Fellowship evaluation for Shareese N. Pryor

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing this fellowship evaluation for Shareese N. Pryor, who was a volunteer law clerk at the Office of the Cook County Public Guardian during the summer of 2010. Shareese received an Equal Justice America Legal Services Summer Fellowship from your organization. I am Assistant Public Guardian Kass A. Plain, and I supervised Shareese in the Appeals Unit. I have worked at the Public Guardian's Office for 17 years, the last four as the supervisor of the Appeals Unit. In addition, I have also supervised courtroom attorneys, numerous law clerks, paralegals, social workers, and clerical staff.

As you may know, the Public Guardian's Office represents abused, neglected and dependent children, children in contested custody disputes, and disabled adults including financially exploited elderly people. Shareese provided excellent research and writing for the attorneys here. Shareese wrote memoranda of law on the issues of the burden of proof at a temporary custody hearing, and appellate jurisdiction under Rule 307 (injunctions). In addition, Shareese helped prepare a prep sheet for our clients with mental health issues. Shareese also reviewed case law summaries, and prepared two separate appendices for appellate briefs. Finally, as an Illinois Supreme Court Rule 711 law student, Shareese handled an Appellate Calendar Status Call with my supervision.

The attorneys here were universally impressed with Shareese's legal analysis, writing abilities, and the ease with which she grasped complex issues. Prior to attending a clinical staffing for a client, Shareese asked insightful and probing questions about our client's status. At the Appellate Calendar Status Call, Shareese was poised and confident in front of the judge.

Shareese showed a dedication to public interest and the clients we represent. Shareese had the same enthusiasm for complex legal research assignments as she did for completing appellate appendices. Shareese epitomized the ideal recipient of the Equal Justice America Legal Services Summer Fellowship. We were very fortunate to have her in our Unit this summer.

Sincerely,

Kass A. Plain
Assistant Public Guardian
Supervisor, Appeals Unit
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