

August 30, 2017

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Equal Justice America's financial assistance enabled me to spend my summer at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, contributing to the work of justice and honing my skills as an advocate. I split my summer between LAF's housing and employment groups, and in both areas I was able to help a wide array of clients targeted by exploitative landlords and employers fight back, protect their families, and secure their rights.

In the housing practice group, I spent most of my time helping with eviction defense and administrative proceedings contesting the loss of government housing subsidies. The eviction economy relies on the assumption that poor families in substandard housing won't speak up about their unjust treatment, and won't fight back when their landlord tries to make them and their children homeless. Our work threw a wrench in the smooth functioning of that system—making sure that our clients had time to find new housing or negotiate payment plans and weren't unfairly evicted for events beyond their control.

Pulitzer-prize winning sociologist Matthew Desmond has summarized some of the effects of evictions: "eviction often increases material hardship, decreases residential security, and brings about prolonged periods of homelessness; it can result in job loss, split up families, and drive people to depression and, in extreme cases, even to suicide; and it decreases one's chances of securing decent and affordable housing, of escaping disadvantaged neighborhoods, and of benefiting from affordable housing programs." It is hard to imagine a more meaningful way to spend a summer than helping shield Chicago's most vulnerable residents from those outcomes.

We helped tenants navigate bureaucracies—the Chicago Housing Authority and Cook County Housing Authority—that often seem unconcerned with the welfare of those they are meant to protect, and too disorganized or moribund to help those overwhelmed by their circumstances. We informed clients in foreclosed properties of their rights to substantial relocation assistance (in excess of \$10,000) upon eviction, and helped secure that transformative aid. And we fought for

systemic changes to allow clients time to find housing outside of segregated neighborhoods—making a small dent in our city and country’s continuing racial segregation.

We fought to help clients escape violence-stricken, segregated neighborhoods; to secure accessible apartments; to avoid homelessness; and to avoid even deeper and more durable poverty, joblessness, and disruption. The work was fulfilling and important in the face of an economy built on exploitation of the poor.

In the employment practice group, I helped workers contest discrimination, retaliation, and the denial of unemployment assistance. Often, it seemed that employers would concoct stories of employee misconduct in order to avoid contributing unemployment payments for workers. Often our clients approached us after their initial hearings—and the transcripts reveal their uncertainty and confusion about the proceedings to which their employer had subjected them. Other clients faced discrimination or retaliation because they became pregnant or took leave for basic medical needs. Those most in need of stable employment and dignified treatment were regularly denied such basic rights.

Across all these cases, I met clients who were terminated from their jobs for minor or nonexistent infractions, with no opportunity to defend themselves, and after years or decades of service to their employers. I thus got to see firsthand what America looks like without strong unions and labor protections: a country of disposability, indignity, and poverty.

Throughout my summer, I got to meet amazing clients, who persevered in the face of adversity, exploitation, and complicated bureaucracies. I got to see the everyday reality of poverty in America. And, thankfully, I had the opportunity to do my small part to help those clients and their families confront and push back against injustice. I am incredibly thankful for that opportunity.

Sincerely,

Andrew Waks

The University of Chicago Law School, Class of 2019



Equal justice starts here.

September 26, 2017

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

Via email to [KATIE@EQUALJUSTICEAMERICA.ORG](mailto:KATIE@EQUALJUSTICEAMERICA.ORG)

Re: Andrew Waks, Equal Justice America Summer 2017 Fellow

Dear Mr. Reuben:

It is a pleasure to write this letter evaluating Andrew Waks's Equal Justice America fellowship. This summer, Andrew worked at LAF (Legal Assistance Foundation). LAF is the largest provider of free civil legal representation in Cook County, Illinois. During his time at LAF, Andrew worked in the Housing Practice Group advocating and representing tenants living in low-income subsidized housing.

It was a pleasure having Andrew with us this summer. During his time with us, Andrew engaged in a wide variety of legal tasks related to housing law. He interviewed clients, drafted pleadings, dispositive motions, and settlement agreements, answered and initiated discovery, and conducted invaluable research. Andrew was one of the most dedicated and hard-working students at LAF.

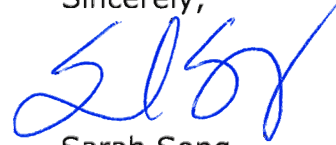
Andrew made sure that he worked with clients in every stage of the eviction process and always treated our clients with respect and empathy. Andrew was always thoughtful and insightful when analyzing and discussing cases and asked well thought out questions from the day he began his fellowship.

Andrew also spent a significant amount of time this summer conducting legal research and drafting a federal complaint for a case in which a local housing authority had discriminated against our client based on her race and violated their own duties to affirmatively further fair housing. This was a novel argument we had never previously advanced, and Andrew was an essential member of our team. He researched the necessary legal standard to bring such a suit and also found essential social science research to support our claim that our client had been disparately impacted by the local housing authority's policies because of her race. He then took on the very difficult step of drafting a very thoughtful out and well written complaint that required very little editing.

Andrew was an invaluable asset to the LAF Housing Practice Group, and we really felt the void when he left. Andrew is insightful, eager to lend a helping hand, and

even more eager to learn and grow. Andrew genuinely wanted to help our clients and exhibited great maturity and compassion for others. Working with him was a great pleasure. Please contact me at the number below if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Sarah Song

Staff Attorney

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