

Equal Justice America
Dan Ruben
Executive Director

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, through an Equal Justice America Fellowship, I was able to work as a legal clerk for Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama. Founded in 1989, EJI is a nonprofit organization that provides legal representation to communities that have received inequitable treatment under the law. Clients include those on death row in Alabama, children sentenced to life without parole, those facing abuse in jails and prisons, and those who have been illegally convicted of crimes. Additionally, EJI is working to change the narrative about race in America. EJI has produced several reports, films, and online content aimed at exploring the nation's history of racial injustice.

This summer I had the opportunity to engage in several projects. One of my main tasks was conducting legal visits with incarcerated individuals across the state of Alabama. I was able to interview individuals who were facing excessive punishment or abuse. I am grateful for the opportunity to hear, transcribe, and report back their stories to senior attorneys who could assess whether we could take on their cases. At one point, I conducted legal research to determine available remedies for a client who was being held in solitary confinement in violation of his constitutional rights. Not only was I able to draft a legal memorandum addressing the issue, but I had the opportunity to draft a filing for him to challenge his confinement. I am incredibly grateful that I was able to utilize the legal research and writing skills I developed as a law student for the benefit of someone facing immense injustice. In addition to legal visits and drafting documents, I was able to conduct a wide range of legal research to support ongoing litigation efforts at both the state and federal levels. Much of my time was spent research *ex post facto* challenges, parole provisions, and due processes challenges to confinement.

While most of my work was purely legal in nature, I also had the opportunity to engage with some policy and historical work. At EJI, work about the historical legacies of racial inequity is not unconnected from the current legal challenges the attorneys seek to tackle. I was able to develop reports on the lynching of Black Americans during the Reconstruction Era, acts of racial terror in the South, and the history of the domestic slave trade. Additionally, I participated in a historical collection trip where I traveled to the site of 32 lynchings of Black Americans throughout the South.

Throughout my time at EJI I was able to better develop many essential legal skills, but my experience was truly transformative because of the clients I was able to learn from. In his book, *Just Mercy*, Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of EJI, says, "Proximity has taught me some basic and humbling truths, including this vital lesson: Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the

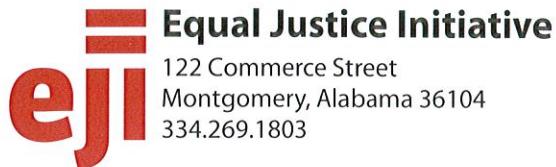
rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned.”

I am unbelievably humbled by the opportunity I had this summer to be “proximate” to some of the grave injustices that individuals face in the criminal justice system in America. My interactions with clients affirmed my commitment to public interest. I feel incredibly fortunate to have access to a legal education that will allow me to challenge persisting systems of inequality. More importantly, my clients reminded me that behind all the legal and academic jargon we toss around are real people who are impacted by our laws, policies, action and also our inaction. I am grateful to Equal Justice America for the opportunity I had to utilize my legal education to challenge systems of mass incarceration, racial inequity, and unjust conditions of confinement.

Thank you,



Laurel Hattix
The University of Chicago Law
School
Class of 2019



August 15, 2017

Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112
Sent via email: katie@equaljusticeamerica.org

RE: Laurel Hattix, Summer 2017 Fellow

To whom it may concern:

I am a staff attorney with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a private, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Montgomery, Alabama, that provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons. We challenge the death penalty and excessive punishment and we provide re-entry assistance to formerly incarcerated people.

Laurel Hattix, a rising 2L at the University of Chicago Law, worked as a legal intern at EJI for 10 weeks this past summer and was awarded a Summer 2017 Fellowship by Equal Justice America. Not only was Laurel's work product exceptional, but so too was her advocacy and commitment to our work. Our summer legal interns are expected to work on a variety of projects and manage a diverse docket, which Laurel handled incredibly well. Laurel was a self-motivated, but careful worker, who made sure to check in and ask questions when needed. She drove across the state of Alabama to conduct legal visits with incarcerated people and wrote thorough memorandums following those visits that allowed our attorneys to assess whether and how we could help people. She also had a wide range of legal research assignments and even used her research to draft a pro se filing for an incarcerated man in solitary confinement whose constitutional rights were being violated.

We were thrilled to have Laurel with us this summer and appreciate Equal Justice America's support of law students like Laurel who are making a tremendous impact on public interest and social justice work in this country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Alison Mollman'.

Alison Mollman
Staff Attorney