

MEREDITH COLLIER
University of Michigan Law School

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I want to thank you for your generosity in providing me with an Equal Justice America fellowship this summer. This summer has truly been the opportunity of a lifetime. I worked in the Child Advocacy Law Clinic and worked directly with children and parents going through abuse and neglect proceedings. I'm so grateful for the experience to work directly with some of Washtenaw County's most vulnerable clients and provide them with quality legal representation. These opportunities have allowed me to develop my leadership skills and learn the real-world skills attorneys need to zealously serve their clients.

As a student attorney in the Child Advocacy Law Clinic, I represented a variety of clients and was able to learn about child welfare law from many angles. I particularly enjoyed working with children as their legal guardian ad litem (LGAL). On one case, I and my partner served as the LGALs to twelve siblings, all in different non-family foster placements. I was responsible for checking up on each of these children, who ranged in age from 18 years to 13 months, to ensure they and their foster families received the appropriate educational, emotional, and psychosocial services they needed. I also met with each child to learn how the child felt about his or her foster placement, separation from the biological parents, and perspective on the situation. This was a complex case that involved constant partnership with social workers, foster families, and multiple parties' attorneys. By the end of the summer, I believe we had started to gain traction in moving towards terminating the parents' rights to ensure the children had stability and permanency in their lives again. While this case will remain within the clinic for several more years, I'm proud to have played a part in moving these children towards a more stable future.

In another case, I worked with a mother whose infant son had been removed from her care at birth when doctors discovered opiates in the infant's bloodstream. The mother, who had maintained a safe methadone treatment regimen during pregnancy after struggling with drug addiction for years, was devastated. Even though this client had a long history of trauma, abuse, and addiction in her past, she refused to buckle under these competing pressures and worked to regain custody of her son. She and her partner married, found jobs, exceeded court-mandated treatment goals, and passed parenting classes with flying colors. By the end of the summer, she and I were able to go before the court and gain back unsupervised visits with her son. She was truly an inspirational client and I'm humbled to have had the chance to represent her in court.

I and my clients sincerely appreciate your support of my legal education as well as your support of public interest law in general.

Sincerely,

Meredith K. Collier