

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
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Mr. Ruben:

This past Spring Semester I was fortunate enough to receive a EJA fellowship grant to work at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF). At LAF, I had the opportunity to work as a law clerk on their children's law project. Specifically, I worked on special education and school discipline issues. This portion of the child law project solely represents DCFS state wards.

The highlights of my experience at LAF included attending a number of school meetings, including Individualized Education Program meetings and Manifestation Determination Reviews. It was invaluable to be able to observe my supervising attorneys in a plethora of settings. I learned a lot about how to interact with clients, opposing counsel, and school officials. Further, I was given the responsibility of contacting and interviewing clients on my own, which provided valuable client interaction experience.

I enjoyed my clerkship for two main reasons. First, I gained valuable skills in communication, researching, and writing through drafting legal documents, interviewing clients, observing school meetings, and researching a range of special education law issues. Second, and more importantly, I played a part in making a difference in disadvantage children's lives by assisting them in obtaining appropriate services for their special needs. Most of the children LAF assists would never be able to afford an attorney on their own, so the services we provided to them were incredibly valuable.

I am grateful that I had the opportunity to clerk at LAF and gain such valuable experience and make a difference in some way. I am also thankful to Equal Justice America for providing me with a fellowship grant to work at LAF.

Sincerely,

Valerie Atria
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Loyola University Chicago School of Law