

September 8, 2014

Mr. Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 24
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer, I had the absolute pleasure of working with LAF Chicago. I worked in the Housing Practice Group, and focused on helping subsidized housing tenants. I helped to defend these tenants in Section 8 voucher termination hearings, forcible detainer and entry eviction suits, and helped to file complaints for violations of the Fair Housing Act.

Two particular clients stand out for me this summer, because I was heavily involved in their Section 8 voucher termination hearings against the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA). The first client had no income, and was living with her 6 children in a 5 bedroom house. Her portion of the rent was \$0, meaning that her federal subsidy paid for the entirety of her rent; the loss of her voucher subsidy would therefore have left her homeless. Her landlord at the time had refused to make mandatory repairs, causing CHA to force her to look for a new apartment. However, given that she was looking for a 5-bedroom house during the winter of 2013, she ran into extraordinary difficulties and was unable to find a landlord who would rent to her until two weeks before her voucher would “expire.” CHA took weeks to schedule the initial inspection with the prospective landlord, the prospective landlord then refused to make the necessary repairs, and CHA did not inform our client that the new location had been denied until two months after the voucher expiration date. Immediately afterwards, CHA initiated the termination process for our client’s subsidy, on the grounds that she had failed her obligation to find a new apartment before the voucher term expired.

I assisted the LAF attorney in preparing for the termination hearing, including conducting the client interviews and rehearsals and preparing the exhibits. I was also able to conduct the direct examination of the client during the hearing itself, and made a demonstrative map graphic that illustrated the extent to which our client had been diligently searching for apartments. This experience, halfway through my summer, allowed me to get an in-depth feel for the administrative hearing and litigation process in a way that is rare to come by in an ordinary 1L summer internship. The hearing officer decided in favor of our client, reinstating her to the Section 8 voucher program and allowing her additional time to find a new apartment.

The second client also had no income and was a senior citizen suffering from several medical disabilities. A CHA annual inspection had designated her apartment as failing CHA’s Housing Quality Standards (HQS), on the grounds that her carpet was soiled. Our client suffered from respiratory illnesses that required her – on doctor’s orders – to diligently clean and shampoo her carpet. As well, CHA’s own HQS guidebook stated that a soiled carpet does not count as a failing condition. Despite these factors, CHA initiated the termination process for our client’s subsidy, based solely on the soiled carpeting.

I was able to play a significant role in this termination hearing: I was assisted by the LAF attorney in preparing for the termination hearing and I conducted the opening and closing arguments, the direct examination of our client, and the cross-examination of the CHA witness. This was an incredible opportunity for me to gain hands-on advocacy experience. In the end, the hearing officer decided in favor of our client and reinstated her to the voucher program.

In total, my summer at LAF allowed me to assist in three voucher termination hearings, dozens of forcible entry and detainer actions, and several § 1983 complaints. Each of those clients and their stories stick indelibly in my mind. I gained an extensive amount of knowledge about one of my biggest passions – housing law – during my summer at LAF, and it was incredible to see the impact that LAF was having on the residents of Chicago. I will continue to volunteer with LAF during the school year and for as long as I can, and my experience this summer was made possible in part by EJA's funding.

Sincerely,

WuDì Wu
University of Chicago Class of 2016

September 18, 2014

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
katie@equaljusticeamerica.org

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to write this review for WuDi Wu, a University of Chicago class of 2016 student, who worked at LAF in the Housing Practice Group this summer. I am a supervisory attorney in LAF's Housing Practice Group and directly supervised WuDi's work on several matters.

I can say without hesitation that WuDi is one of the brightest law students I have supervised. Because he had only completed one year of law school (which routinely surprised me because his written work was so good), he primarily undertook legal research and writing assignments. He also represented two Housing Choice Voucher tenants in administrative hearings. Finally, he drafted discovery requests and responses and a federal court complaint.

WuDi was responsible for most of the research and drafting on cross-motions for summary judgment on the issue of whether possession of a BB gun was a material violation of a subsidized housing lease. He prepared much more thoroughly researched briefs than we could possibly have imagined without his assistance. After discussing the case at a County-wide Tenants' Advocates' meeting, we were happy to provide the final product to several other programs that will be able to use the research in their cases.

WuDi worked extensively on a case brought by a public housing tenant alleging that the public housing authority had metered her property improperly so that she was required to pay for common area utility charges. In addition to legal research on a motion for summary judgment,

WuDi, relying on his previous experience as a management consultant, prepared an analysis of the utility charges. We were fortunate that he brought this previous experience that is not usually available to a legal aid agency.

Because his commitment to these tasks and his remarkable speed in grasping concepts and completing assignments, I could not detail all of the work he completed this summer on behalf of our clients. Most important, however, is that he has made the additional commitment to work at LAF during the school year. So coaching him through the administrative hearings (which he won, of course) was actually an investment by the program as he will now be able to represent clients at these administrative hearings on his own in the future (a law degree is not required).

EJA's sponsorship of WuDi's work at LAF this summer was the best example of extending legal services with resources that otherwise would be unavailable and investing in a future attorney who will continue to contribute to seeking justice for low income individuals. Thank you for making that possible. Please contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michelle J. Gilbert".

Michelle J. Gilbert

Supervisory Attorney

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