

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

September 16, 2019

Dear Dan:

My summer as a student attorney at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau is one that I will remember throughout my career. There was never a dull moment on the Family Law Unit; from the moment I began, I hit the ground running getting to know my clients, preparing for trials and other court appearances, and dealing with opposing counsel. I knew going into the position that I would be expected to perform all of the responsibilities of a licensed attorney, which both excited and terrified me. Law school teaches you about the law and legal theory, but it does not necessarily prepare you to be a lawyer. For example, I had never appeared before a judge prior to my internship. I am so grateful that I pushed myself to work through my fears to join the Bureau because I feel way more confident and assured that I will be an amazing lawyer.

Within my first two weeks at the Bureau, I had an experience with a client that will stay with me forever. This particular client was in an extremely vulnerable position, both financially and physically, and was going through a painful divorce that had been dragging through the court for almost two years. It was evident that they did not have much trust for their ex-spouse, the judge, or any of the lawyers involved up until that point—and for good reason. We were set for trial just two weeks after my start date, and I soon devoted all of my energy and resources into negotiating a settlement with opposing counsel, conferring with my client, and preparing for a contested trial in the event that we would not reach an agreement. Conversations with my client were often painful and laborious, as my client had such little trust for their ex-spouse that they were hesitant to agree to even the most favorable of terms. When the date of trial arrived, we reached a settlement literally minutes before the judge was to step off the bench, and even received a personal commendation from the judge, who was aware of how ugly and contentious the divorce had been for both parties and was glad to see them reach an agreement. Weeks later when I called my client to inform them of my departure from the Bureau, they sounded like a major weight had been lifted from their shoulders. They thanked me for my work, and it was clear that they were better off having reached an agreement on their own terms and were able to move on with their life. After that phone call, I was more assured that this is the kind of work that I am meant to do.

I can confidently say that this summer provided me with more practical lawyering experience than if I had interned in a private law firm like some of my peers. My friends who interned in other legal aid organizations agree with this sentiment. When you work for a traditional law firm as a student, you are not trusted to fully represent clients like you are working for a public interest organization. Aside from my first trial, I wrote and argued motions

in court, had countless client meetings, navigated adversarial interactions with opposing counsel outside the courtroom, and even got the upper hand for a client in an explosive four-way conference. While I did stumble and make mistakes at times, I think that I am better off as an attorney having gotten my start in legal aid instead of spending a summer doing research for a firm and maybe sitting in on meetings. Legal aid organizations put a lot of trust in student attorneys, which is necessary both to develop skills and also to invigorate us to persist in public interest work. I will take the lessons I learned this summer to my first post-grad position and beyond.

I think Equal Justice America is a wonderful organization for helping both law students and the communities they are able to serve through the summer funding program. I have classmates that wanted to work in public interest, but instead took paid summer internships at law firms because they were financially unable to take an unpaid position and risk not receiving funding later on. I consider myself very fortunate that I was able to receive funding and could devote all my energy to my clients instead of working a second job like others I know. I plan on paying it forward when I am more established in my career, and I would encourage anyone who is financially able to contribute to the summer intern fund so that those in need may continue receiving quality representation.

Thanks again for an unforgettable summer!

Sincerely,

Kristen Dimitrov-Kuhl
Boston University School of Law, 2020