

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

August 29, 2012

I gained a lot from my internship at Central Virginia Legal Aid Society by working under a staff attorney who handles a wide variety of cases. This exposure to different areas of the law allowed me to learn about several areas and practice drafting different types of legal documents. I did a lot of work in family law and housing law along with a little in unemployment and several other types of cases.

Central Virginia Legal Aid Society has a lot of clients with family law cases. After I watched my supervisor help several clients with protective orders, she would ask me to advise potential clients about the process. I called several women who had experienced domestic abuse and had left their husbands or were preparing to. I talked them through the process of obtaining an emergency protective order and how that could lead to a permanent protective order. I was careful not to tell the clients what to do, but I was at least able to make sure they were informed of the legal processes and what rights they had. I was more involved with other family law cases and helped my supervisor by preparing documents for a spousal support settlement and by coordinating with two clients who had lost custody of their child. In that case, the parents' mental health had been at issue, but their doctors both testified that they were competent parents. I assisted my supervisor by sorting through their medical records and writing a summary of the evidence and keeping in contact with the clients to make sure they were completing what they needed to do before the trial. I had switched internships by the time the case was litigated, but my supervisor was successful in helping the parents re-gain custody.

In housing law, I worked on two tenant's assertions and two evictions. One tenant's assertion ended with a judgment for our client, allowing her to move out of her roach-infested apartment that day and gain back \$600 of the rent she had paid into court. I helped my supervisor by organizing the evidence before the hearing. It was exciting to see my supervisor hand the judge a chart I had made which summarized sixteen extermination dates and accompanying notes, especially after opposing counsel wasted so much time having a maintenance representative read every date and comment out loud. I also helped my supervisor prepare for a tenant's assertion case that she originally won, so to speak, but her clients were not happy with the amount they got back from escrow and appealed. I helped her organize the 300 pages of discovery opposing counsel sent and also prepared and delivered the documents they requested. In an eviction case, it became apparent during the informal hearing with the client's Section 8 complex leasing office that the client had not been truthful to us and the landlord was justified in evicting her. We worked with opposing counsel to settle the case so she would not have an eviction in her record and would have several months to find a new apartment.

I was fortunate to work with one client whose case was timed such that I got to be very involved in multiple aspects of her defense. I came to the office as my supervisor was preparing to write the client's grounds of defense, so I drafted them for her and confirmed all facts with the client. I continued to check in with the client as we approached the hearing to make sure we had a full understanding of the somewhat confusing facts in this eviction case. We prevailed at the hearing and our client was permitted to stay in her public housing. The landlord appealed and I drafted the admission, interrogates, and requests for documents for my supervisor. It was a great opportunity to think about what we knew and why our client should not be convicted and how I could write admissions and questions that would make our point clear. The appeal has not yet been heard, but I was happy to be so involved with this case, especially because the client was very honest with us and enjoyable to work with.

I also wrote three memoranda to the Virginia Employment Commission Special Examiner to help office attorneys prepare for arguments. Those decisions have not been issued yet, so I am not sure of the outcome. I was happy to get to watch my supervisor and another attorney in our office argue on behalf of the clients whose memoranda I had drafted, especially with the Special Examiner made reference to the memo. I had hoped to get to argue on behalf of a client myself after observing two arguments, but we did not have any such appropriately timed cases. I did, however, have the opportunity to interview three potential clients and speak with my supervisor after taking in all of the information relevant to their termination. That was a great learning experience to work independently and then confer with my supervisor about what we could do.

I greatly enjoyed my summer with Central Virginia Legal Aid Society and appreciated the autonomy that I had within the organization. I also in a government position and although both were wonderful learning experiences, I got to do a lot more at CVLAS, which helped develop my practical understanding of the law.

Thank you for your support,

Amanda Cottingham