

August 8, 2008

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 E. Boundary Road
Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112
Phone: (804) 744-5678
Fax: (804) 744-6789
DanR@EqualJusticeAmerica.org

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I was an intern at the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) in Petersburg, Virginia. As an intern with LAJC I helped with a wide variety of legal issues ranging from consumer issues to landlord-tenant issues to issues dealing with estates. All this work was done for clients that desperately needed legal help but could not afford an attorney.

I worked directly under Stephen Dickinson, the managing attorney for the LAJC, from whom I learned a great deal and to whom I am immensely grateful. A large portion (perhaps half) of the work I performed was on standard landlord-tenant issues (e.g. evictions for non-payment of rent or other reasons). I learned that even in these "standard" cases, the legal and factual issues can often become quite complicated. For example, in one of the first issues I worked on, a client was evicted and then allowed back into the premises after partial payment of rent. After a few months, she defaulted on her rent again. The plaintiff wanted to use the same writ of possession that he had used for the earlier eviction so that he did not have to go back to court to evict our client. We forced the landlord to follow proper legal procedure so that our client could at least have more time to find a new place to live.

In every landlord-tenant case that I worked on there was some type of complication that made the cases both interesting to work on and legally significant. Furthermore, Petersburg is a poor area where only large renters or property management companies can afford lawyers. Without the LAJC there would be no one to protect the interests of tenants. Working on these cases, I saw the deep emotions that are involved in landlord-tenant issues. The landlords are often disgusted with their tenants, who they see as akin to thieves. Tenants are often shocked that someone could be heartless enough to attempt to remove them from their home over a late payment or two. I learned how in these situations an attorney can be a calming force and help to prevent problems from escalating (which helps both landlords and tenants).

I also worked on several cases involving consumer issues, specifically Article 9 of the Uniform Commercial Code and the Truth in Lending Act. In these cases I saw how unscrupulous businesses people specifically target the poor and vulnerable. One elderly client of very modest means purchased a vehicle financed at an high interest rate. Soon after the warranty expired, the car broke down and was a total loss. The car was

Dan Ruben
September 3, 2008
Page 2

repossessed and our client was stuck with the bill. Through our efforts we were able to counter-claim for violations of the Truth in lending act and significantly reduce our client's cost.

Finally, I worked on examining the utility allowance provided to residents of Petersburg public housing. From my initial investigation it appears that hundreds of residents are being overcharged for their utilities by tens (if not hundreds) of dollars each month. Although I did not stay long enough to see this case through, I hope to return to the LAJC for a "for-credit" externship so that I can further participate in this case.

In short, I enjoyed my time at LAJC. I received practical experience in areas that are of high significance in everyday life and I was able to work for clients who otherwise might have been bulldozed by the legal process. This internship has strengthened an interest I have in public service and increased my awareness of the legal needs of the poor.

Sincerely,

Andrew P. Hanlin
William and Mary School of Law
Class of 2009