

September 2, 2010

Mr. Dan Ruben

Equal Justice America

Building II, Suite 204

13540 East Boundary Road

Midlothian, Virginia 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

During the summer of 2010, I interned at the Williamsburg office of the Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia, where I met with clients, drafted memoranda and court documents, and observed protective order hearings. The story of one client's pursuit of a protective order exemplifies Legal Aid's skill at engendering our client's trust and hope and promoting equal justice. Our client, Mrs. H, had been married for over a decade and had six children with her husband, but her husband regularly threatened and verbally and emotionally abused her. Mrs. H had previously taken out a preliminary protective order against her husband, but another attorney failed to inform her that she also needed a permanent protective order; as a result, her PPO expired, and to get another PO, she had to wait for her husband to threaten or harm her again. When she arrived at our office, therefore, she had little faith in the justice system or in an attorney's willingness or ability to help her.

In the initial client interview, Mrs. H told us that the incident that brought her to our office involved yet another threat on her life – but this time, her husband also threatened the children. One night, her husband coolly and calmly threatened to kill Mrs. H and her children. Although Mrs. H considered leaving with her children, she was afraid her husband would hear

them leaving and follow through on his threat. Instead, our client awoke in the middle of the night, after hardly sleeping, and found a machete that her husband had hidden near their bed. She removed the machete, but she was so frightened that for the rest of the night, she slept on the couch with the machete under one of the cushions. The next morning, when her husband awoke, he immediately asked for his machete, at which point Mrs. H knew she had to leave. With the guidance and support of the local women's shelter, Mrs. H petitioned for and received a preliminary protective order. But she was determined not to allow the PPO to expire again, so Mrs. H contacted our office to represent her during the permanent protective order hearing.

By the time the hearing was scheduled to begin, Mrs. H's husband had already made a deal with the Legal Aid attorney. Like many abusers, Mrs. H's husband was apologetic during the hearing, and repeatedly said that he still loved Mrs. H. But for the first time, Mrs. H refused to take him back. Surrounded by friends, supported by Legal Aid, and protected by the court's order, Mrs. H felt empowered. The court awarded Mrs. H a two-year protective order, which gave her possession of the home and two vehicles. The order also prohibited her husband from contacting her for any purpose other than to arrange visitation with the children, and Mrs. H could decide whether to allow him to see the children because of the threats he made toward them. Before the hearing, Mrs. H was defeated, but after the hearing, with Legal Aid's help, Mrs. H was triumphant. Seeing the joy, confidence, and triumph on her face was exactly the reason I chose to work at the Legal Aid Society.

Sincerely,

Emily L. Riggs

William & Mary School of Law, Class of 2012

Darryl W. Cunningham
MANAGING ATTORNEY

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September 9, 2010

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
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Midlothian, VA 23112

RE: Emily Riggs
Equal Justice America Fellowship

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Please accept this summary regarding the Equal Justice America Fellowship completed by Emily Riggs at our office during the summer of 2010. It was a pleasure to have her here and to work in tandem with EJA in providing this experience for her.

Emily worked on a variety of things during the course of her time with us although her primary focus was on domestic violence issues. She updated the domestic violence information I use to teach a clinic at William & Mary Law School and for community presentations. Not only did she update, but she organized, modified and/or created a variety of helpful practice guides. She also worked with the local abuse shelter to make certain victims were receiving all the legal assistance they needed, not just in the area of protective orders.

Ms. Riggs also researched various areas of law relating to client cases; interacted with clients, lawyers, and court staff; drafted various pleadings and documents; and contributed to the basic representation of numerous clients.

Emily's work was exceptional and her enthusiasm unending. She treated co-workers and clients with dignity and respect. She has an excellent professional and personal demeanor, attitude, and work ethic that will serve her well.

I can assure you that the stipend paid during this fellowship was money well spent and, given Emily's efforts, it did not begin to cover the value of her services. Her presence and contributions allowed me and my staff to provide services to more people and tackle issues that otherwise may have been beyond our reach. It also allowed the abuse shelter to stretch its limited resources likewise.

Thank you for your program and efforts to provide experiences like this to Emily and many others.

Please let me know if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Darryl W. Cunningham