

August 9, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My name is Jesse Gentry and I had the opportunity to intern in the Farmville office of Virginia Legal Aid Society (VLAS). Had it not been for the funding provided by the Equal Justice America, this internship opportunity would not have been available to me due to the travel expenses incurred from a nearly hour commute each day. Truly, I appreciate the funding your organization provided as it allowed me to extend a helping hand to many individuals who otherwise may not have been able to be served.

This summer, VLAS was able to intake more clients during the months I interned due to the added work I could provide. Many of these new clients were seeking no-fault divorces, but there were also several housing, custody, power of attorney, and public benefits cases. With these cases, I was able to interview clients for intake, draft documents for the various courts, write letters to the clerks and other attorneys, as well as to call many clients to congratulate them on a successful end to their issue. Overall, I worked on over 65 separate cases over the course of my 10 week internship.

One of the most memorable clients I dealt with was a divorce case. At the beginning of the summer, I did not think the divorce cases would be exciting or fulfilling. Many of my family members have gone through the pain-staking labor that is a contested divorce and I was not looking forward to working through the divorce process. What I learned, however, was how emotionally important a divorce could be.

Many of our divorce clients who sought divorces were victims of abuse. They had been stuck in marriages where they were physically and emotionally abused but stated they felt compelled to stay with their spouses. Some of the women that came in had been separated for years from their husbands, due to incarceration or abandonment, but still feared he may come back for them.

One of the women I worked with was physically abused by her husband and stayed with him for years, but when he smashed her car window, she finally left him. Although she had been separated from her husband for a number of years, she was still wary about filing for divorce. Being able to talk her through the process and make her feel supported was more worthwhile to all of us involved, even though we easily successfully helped her with her legal issue. By the time her divorce was finalized, you could feel a wave of relief transcend the phone lines as our client was relieved to finally feel free.

This summer was more than just about getting experience in the legal field; I effectively was able to build upon and use the legal knowledge I had gained through my experience as a first year law student. More importantly than the drafting and research work I completed, I was able to provide desperately needed service to individuals who needed help. I helped solve many legal

problems, but I was given the opportunity to show compassion and kindness to those who needed it.

I had a very worthwhile summer as I was able to help clients with sub-standard housing issues, landlord-tenant problems, divorces, wills, power of attorneys, custody, and different public benefits. I may have developed my legal knowledge further than I had through textbooks, but most importantly, I also learned how lawyers interact with clients and how issues proceed in the real world. I do not know if I will make a career out of public service, but I do know I will spend my career helping offices like Legal Aid through pro bono work and by donating funds to the offices and organizations that give grants to law school interns who work in public service.

Thank you again for helping me through your funding to allow me to have such a wonderful summer experience.

Sincerely,
Jesse Gentry
Liberty School of Law, 2015