

August 9, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

During the summer of 2014, I had the opportunity to work for the Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia (LASEVA) at the Williamsburg, Virginia office, and gain more legal experience than I ever could have imagined. My responsibilities included assisting our attorney on behalf of our indigent clients in all aspects of civil law. Most of my work involved clients with child custody, child support, spousal support, divorce, and domestic violence disputes; however, I also has the opportunity to work on one or two cases dealing with landlord-tenant issues and estate issues. Each day at LASEVA brought something new, and thus I obtained experience researching and writing on legal issues, preparing evidence for hearings, and communicating with clients. My experience this summer was another step toward my legal career dream of being a true advocate for those in need of legal assistance without the means to acquire it. I am so thankful to Equal Justice America for providing me with a stipend, making it feasible for me to gain the legal experience I wanted.

At LASEVA, I was able to gain a great deal of legal experience in a short amount of time; however, I found the most rewarding part of the experience to be learning how to communicate with emotional clients in an efficient way. When working in family law, it is important to be compassionate toward the client's situation, while also providing the client with a rationale point of view and competent legal advice. I worked closely with one of our clients who wanted a divorce based on fault grounds. This client desired a divorce based on cruelty grounds to ensure she would obtain spousal support to restart her life. The client sent me diary entries, psychiatric reports, and etc. as evidence to show her husband's cruelty. As I waded through this evidence, I soon realized a divorce based on cruelty was an unlikely possibility in this client's situation. I then faced the daunting task of calling the client and explaining that every marriage has its ups and downs and the downs, such as name calling and fighting, do not amount to cruelty, or else almost every marriage could be dissolved based on cruelty. By the end of this conversation, I was able to convince the client that while she went through a terrible ordeal in her marriage, her best bet was to change the grounds for divorce and hope to obtain spousal support in another fashion. In this way, I effectively showed compassion while giving rationale legal advice, a balancing act that is far from easy. Nevertheless, after completing this daunting task, I found the client trusted me more than ever and continued to contact me throughout the summer regarding her case. I realized that within the family law practice area, a lawyer must be a shoulder to cry on and a voice of reason at the same time. It meant the world to know I had the ability to be a true legal advocate for a client going through the most emotionally charged legal dispute.

This is just one of the many tasks I completed, which would have terrified me back in May. Being the provider of bad news is never a fun task; but it is something that must be done when advocating for someone else's best interests. I am so proud of myself for rising to the challenge and so thankful to Equal Justice America for providing me with the financial opportunity to gain legal experience and help those truly in need of legal assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lacey Coppage', written in a cursive style.

Lacey Coppage  
William & Mary Law School  
JD Candidate May 2016