

August 31, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I had the privilege of working at Bay Area Legal Aid's Santa Clara County office as a legal clerk. During my internship I assisted numerous low-income families with housing issues throughout San Jose and Santa Clara County. Specifically, I managed to help a number of clients retain their Section 8 Housing Vouchers and prevented unlawful detainers from being filed against them.

One of the most rewarding moments during my time at BayLegal was when we reached a settlement agreement after negotiating with opposing counsel. Our client was the mother of newborn twins and could not pay her rent during the months she was in the hospital. She required bedrest and was in no condition to work. Despite knowledge of this, the client's landlord demanded she move out. We requested a reasonable accommodation but never received an answer from the landlord. As a result, we helped the client file a pre-complaint inquiry with the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing for disability discrimination. In the end, we prevented a family of six from being homeless and stopped an unlawful detainer from appearing on the client's credit report.

Because unlawful detainers are summary proceedings, many of the clients came to BayLegal's office in crisis. As such, meeting a housing deadline was crucial to a client's case. I was able to experience this firsthand when I prepared an Answer in Pro Per in response to a landlord's Complaint. The client's response was due the same day she came in for help. Fortunately, we completed the Answer and the client was able to file it with the court on time. The client avoided a default judgment against her and received more time to look for alternative housing.

A majority of the clients that I helped were elderly individuals with both physical and mental disabilities. This would make client interactions difficult at times because of how overwhelming the situation would be. These people risked losing their homes and were often frustrated and antagonistic. Despite this, it was always rewarding to see how relieved and thankful clients were after providing assistance. One client in particular was able to start negotiating with her landlord after we helped her request a reasonable accommodation. The client suffered from depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The landlord was trying to evict our client without cause so property management could rent the unit to someone else. After several letters to the landlord, property management ultimately rescinded the client's 90-Day Notice to terminate her tenancy and even offered to renew her lease.

Seeing how heavily people relied on non-profit organizations like BayLegal helped me realize just how important providing legal aid and serving the public interest was. My time at BayLegal was challenging, productive, and fun. I will never forget the sense of community and camaraderie so inherent in their office culture. They provided a safe space for me to learn and ask questions. It was a strong reminder of why I went to law school in the first place. The funding and support I received from Equal Justice America allowed me to have this great summer experience. I learned a great deal about the legal profession and found a greater appreciation for public interest work. As a result, I am now more confident and better prepared to continue my legal career at Santa Clara University and give back to my community.

Sincerely,

/s/

Brian Olfato  
Santa Clara University School of Law  
Class of 2018