

August 18, 2010
Dan Ruben, Executive Director

Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, Virginia 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer, I interned at Legal Aid Justice Center at the Richmond, Virginia branch. I found my summer fellowship experience to be a rewarding and educational experience. I assisted with cases dealing with a variety of the issues that Legal Aid Justice Center handles, such as educational law through their JustChildren program, housing law, and unemployment compensation issues. Because I was able to work on cases dealing with an array of issues, I was always learning something new and the work never became dull.

During my fellowship, there were several clients I assisted in particular whose cases and issues were rather compelling. The first client was a housing case. The client was a woman who had been living in public housing for several years, and had been a repeat client of the office. She was scheduled to have yet another unlawful detainer action against her because her public housing authority refused to recognize that she had a hardship situation that exempted her from paying the normal amount of rent. As a result, she was continually charged for rent that she didn't owe, along with a number of fees and repairs that she should not have owed. When she came in the office, I performed the initial interview and found out she had been receiving notices from her landlord for several months. After obtaining her story and her papers, opposing counsel served the bill of particulars shortly after. Careful review of her documents, and some research, showed that the grounds for the unlawful detainer should be thrown out because of defective notices to our client. I wrote the grounds of defense to reflect my findings. While the case ended up as a default judgment for our client, I felt that the work I did for the client paid off. We were really prepared for our case had it been tried, and the client needed someone to help her through the process. Here was someone who was in danger of being kicked out of her home, with nowhere to go, and no money for her to move somewhere else. I am glad that I was able to help her, and I hope she does not find herself in this situation again.

Another client I assisted that I felt strongly about was another housing case, this time dealing with the Fair Housing Act. The issue was that our client was facing housing discrimination because of her handicap. In this case, the client was both physically and mentally handicapped, and lost her Housing Choice voucher granted by the local public housing authority because her handicaps prevented her from fulfilling some of the obligations of her voucher program. She received some assistance from her family who did not live with her, but has such difficulty communicating due to a stroke that her family did not realize she needed assistance fulfilling her voucher obligations until she had already lost her voucher. She now is unable to pay her rent without assistance from her family because her disability is not enough to cover the portion once covered by the voucher. I did the research for this case to determine if a claim could be made for a reasonable accommodation request of her voucher being reinstated because of her disabilities. Our request for a reasonable accommodation was denied, so I then drafted a complaint to be filed in circuit court for an injunction against the termination of her voucher. The office is hoping to negotiate out of court for an equitable result, but as of right now, the matter is

currently unresolved. I am glad I was able to help this client with her case because of how unfair her situation seemed to me. She was only in the situation of losing her voucher because of her handicaps, not because she was an irresponsible tenant. I hope her voucher is reinstated to her before too much more time passes, because otherwise she will not be able to continue living in her home, and she does not have an alternative living arrangement as of right now.

Among the other projects I worked on this summer were research for a variety of unemployment compensation hearings through the Virginia Employment Commission. I usually did some research per week for whatever hearings were scheduled that week. I also did research and document review for several education law issues, primarily on issues of re-entry into the public school system after students had served time in juvenile detention. It amazed me how many problems were still prevalent with getting kids re-enrolled in school—there were some students in which it took months for them to be enrolled back in class from the time they were released from juvenile detention.

I really appreciated the opportunity to work for Legal Aid Justice Center and for Equal Justice America giving me a fellowship to help fund me working there. It was a great experience and I would certainly recommend it to other law students.

Sincerely,

Samantha Vrscak
William & Mary School of Law
Class of 2011