

To: Dan Ruben, Executive Director Equal Justice America

From: Grace Zimmerman, Equal Justice America Summer 2022 Fellow

Date: September 10, 2022

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Over the course of this past summer, I was lucky enough to be able to work with one of the most wonderful organizations in the Chicagoland area that is dedicated towards ending sexual and gender-based violence. As a frontrunner in this field in the city of Chicago, the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE) works to provide advocacy and legal support for those who have experienced sexual harm in several different facets. CAASE works to support survivors of non-intimate partner and familial sexual violence regardless of gender, religion, race, sexual orientation, or other social identities that can impact how survivors are able to seek help.

During my time working with CAASE, I was able to work on both survivor cases in the court system and advocacy and policy work regarding the laws that allow survivors to access justice. In my work with survivors' cases, I was able to work on several different legal questions and issues that our clients were facing in the wake of experiencing sexual violence. Some of the tasks I was assigned included organizing a client's arrest record and verifying all the information of each conviction and charge brought against the client to ensure that the sealing and expungement of her record would go smoothly despite having charges in several different counties and with several different law enforcement agencies. I was able to use court records and law enforcement documents to verify the client's identity and ensure that all information that was provided on our motions matched that of the specific charge for which the motion was related. In addition, I was able to attend a court hearing to determine whether a client's mental health record would be entered into evidence despite the prosecution considering a plea deal that hinged on the victim's mental health record not being released to the defendant. Though I took on the role of more of a spectator and observer in this particular appearance, I was incredibly grateful to be part of the team of legal professionals whose role was to specifically support the victim in a criminal proceeding, where often the victim is not the most protected party in the room, or even allowed to know what is going on.

In addition to my work with client data and court proceedings, I partnered with an attorney at CAASE to review and rewrite the statute regarding civil remedies for non-consensual distribution of intimate images, more colloquially known as the laws surrounding "revenge porn." Presently, the state of Illinois has one of the strongest civil and criminal protections for victims of revenge porn, though the law still leaves the victim with a significant lack of recourse against some parties that could and should be held liable for their part in internet-based sexual harm. Through a thorough review of the laws provided in each state of the country, I was able to create a comprehensive comparison of the access to justice available to victims depending on their state laws and look for gaps in the protections available in Illinois. By comparing the language available in laws across the country, we were able to create a proposal to present to Illinois congresspersons to consider bolstering the current protections of survivors of this type of violence.

Because of my passion for this role and the graciousness of the organization, I am able to continue my work with CAASE through the fall semester to continue engaging with clients and working on essential policies to protect survivors of gender-based violence. I have strengthened my passion for working in this field over the course of this summer and am incredibly grateful to both CAASE and Equal Justice America for providing me the opportunity to explore my career in such a fulfilling and empowering way.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Zimmerman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Grace Zimmerman

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