

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 201
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am so grateful to the East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC) and Equal Justice America for making my summer internship advocating for low-income young people and their families possible. I was able to learn from the talented attorneys and social workers at EBCLC and work in my own community where I myself was once a young person. As an intern for the Education Defense and Justice for Youth Clinic (EDJY), I worked with lawyers and social workers in collaboration to provide support for youth who found themselves facing education discipline or juvenile delinquency charges, and often our clients found themselves at the intersection of *both*. As you very-well know, such public interest work is often underfunded, and as a result places financial obstacles on those who hope to advocate for marginalized communities.

Much of my work experience this summer was providing legal advocacy to our clients who were facing school push-out and recommendations for expulsion. While many young people and their families navigate this process without legal assistance, the impacts of school pushout are devastating and disproportionately harm poor children and children of color, particularly black children. I interviewed clients, corresponded directly with opposing counsel, requested, and managed records, and prepared for an expulsion hearing. My favorite part of this process was independently crafting legal strategies that utilized persuasive storytelling *and* actionable legal claims. During the very last week of my internship, the school district agreed to drop their recommendation for expulsion for one of my clients! It became clear to me that the consequences of education discipline were serious, from the emotional harms of being ostracized from community to the correlations between school push-out and criminal legal system-involvement. Given these consequences, it was clear to me that young people and their families deserved legal advocacy through this process and such advocacy was not possible without generous funding to organizations like EBCLC.

One element of my internship that was both informative and personally rewarding was going to visit our clients who were held in custody at the Juvenile Justice Center. One fundamental practice of EBCLC's client centered-model is visiting clients in custody

once a week— whether or not there were case-related matters we needed to discuss. This practice was important in both building relationships of trust with our clients, but also informed our ability to advocate for broader policy changes around juvenile justice and custodial practices. I was able to bring the experiences of my clients to conversations with other stakeholders to challenge the harmful practices of police, probation, and begin to reimagine alternatives.

The value of these experiences and conversations became clear to me when I participated in the Free Our Kids Coalition on behalf of EBCLC. The Coalition was community-built and centered the voices of young people, their families, and their communities. While the Coalition had many issues to consider, the impacts of AB823 remained at the forefront. AB823 was enacted in 2020 to phase out the use of the state-run Department of Juvenile Justice facilities and to instead turn to local counties to create long-term facilities for youth detention. While AB823 remains a major victory for communities and organizers, it requires continued attention to local counties' implementation of AB823. It was extremely gratifying to be able to listen in on meetings and connect the experiences of my clients to the movement to end youth incarceration.

As a result of summer experiences, I have dedicated myself to a career in youth justice and community accountability to challenge the systems that harm and punish poor communities of color. This experience would not have been possible without the generous support of Equal Justice America. Thank you again for your support!

Best,
Amber Jimenez
Berkeley Law