

September 6, 2024

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This past summer, I had the opportunity to work in MetroWest Legal Services' Housing Unit, located in Framingham, Massachusetts. The Housing Unit advises and represents indigent clients undergoing eviction or foreclosure, with the goals of keeping them in their homes and, if applicable, protecting their subsidized housing. Like most legal aid offices, they have no shortage of work to do. There are five attorneys and two paralegals in the Housing Unit, and between them they cover two to three hundred cases at a time. As a result, the office usually has an "all hands on deck" feel to it. Attorneys cover each other's cases when they are scheduled for the same time in multiple courts. Meetings to discuss new intakes always run long because of the sheer volume. A description like this might give the impression that the office is chaotic. While I can't deny there is an element of chaos in their work, it is a necessary byproduct of the attorneys' dedication to the community they serve. They could decide to take fewer cases or refuse to serve the clients who come in with the same issue time and time again. But they march on and take the difficult cases in stride along with the routine ones. As I move forward with my career in the law, I will not forget the time I spent at MetroWest among attorneys so committed to doing justice.

Despite the large number of clients that the Housing Unit might serve at one time, the cases turn over rather quickly. For better or worse, eviction cases in Massachusetts often see final judgements issued within two or three months, or even less for those that are resolved by settlement. As an intern though, this provided a unique experience in which I was able to follow cases from their inception at intake all the way to their end in settlement or trial. MetroWest also encouraged me to actively participate in many of the stages of litigation. Throughout the summer, I frequently did intakes for new clients, prepared answer and discovery filings, drafted agreements for judgement, and attended client meetings with my supervisor. Working in eviction defense, particularly at MetroWest, allowed me to get hands on experience with each key part of the litigation process, a valuable and rare opportunity during a ten-week internship.

The attorneys and paralegals at MetroWest also dedicate a considerable amount of time to supporting their clients outside of the legal context, helping them apply for rental assistance, connecting them with social services, and checking in with them to make sure they are able to comply with the terms of their settlement agreements after representation has ended. My supervisor makes sure that all of his clients have his cell phone number. In the past, he has even

helped a client move their belongings to a new location because they weren't able to do so themselves. It was enlightening to see a legal office handle their clients' housing problems so holistically. They recognize that these issues often don't emerge out of thin air, but instead are deeply connected to mental health issues, disabilities, and other disadvantages stemming from poverty and systemic oppression. Sometimes, MetroWest is able to completely change a family's trajectory and help them take the first steps in their journey out of poverty. Sometimes, they just help them avoid the worst potential consequences of their housing crisis. But I struggle to express just how much of an impression this ethos left on me. I realized that a lawyer's work doesn't end in the office or the courtroom. At times it must, but a lawyer that is in true pursuit of justice for their clients must also go further.

Sincerely,

Greg Bowe

Boston University School of Law