

August 29, 2024

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director, Equal Justice America  
3007 East Boundary Terrace  
Suite 201  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Attorney Ruben,

My internship this summer at Greater Boston Legal Services' CORI and Reentry Unit was an invaluable experience. I am deeply grateful for the support of Equal Justice America for making this opportunity possible.

In the CORI and Reentry Unit, I was one of three student interns supporting clients as they navigated the process of sealing and/or expunging their criminal records and applying for pardon certificates.

My experience at GBLs allowed me to develop a robust understanding of the intricacies of Massachusetts sealing and expungement law. This understanding made me a more effective advocate for our clients. As my familiarity with the sealing and expungement process grew, I was better able to communicate clients' options to them in clear terms. This empowered them to navigate the process in a way that was relevant to their specific needs.

In addition to the practical and legal understanding that this internship supported me in developing, I was also able to witness, appreciate, and work to mitigate the incredible barriers that a criminal record can create in a person's life.

One unexpected thing I learned this summer was that a significant portion of individuals' criminal records are often made up of nonconvictions. Massachusetts, like most states, does not have automatic sealing. This means that if your case is dismissed or not prosecuted, it remains on your record as a nonconviction until you decide to seal it through an administrative or court process. If you are found not guilty, your case is supposed to be automatically sealed, but this was often not the case. This meant that the majority of my work this summer was geared towards mitigating the collateral consequences of criminal cases that did not end in a conviction. This expanded my appreciation and outrage for the incredible impact that criminal justice system entanglement has, not only on individuals, but on entire communities that are disproportionately targeted by policing and the prison system.

Helping clients to seal their records was incredibly rewarding. Many folks have to devote significant time and energy to the sealing process. The success of this process, for which the vast majority of people represent themselves, is often the determining factor in whether someone has access to housing, employment, and being able to participate fully in the lives of their family and their communities.

At GBLS, I was able to assist clients who were determined to start their own businesses, go back to school, or return to a career they had invested decades into, that were being held back because of their criminal record. Providing support throughout this often overwhelming and confusing process was incredibly rewarding. The material support I was able to provide – drafting affidavits, completing paperwork, filing petitions, etc. – was just as appreciated by my clients as the sense that they now had someone on their side.

I was able to witness the ripple effects that this had in the lives of my clients, as they gained confidence that they would no longer be trapped by their criminal records. I had a client show me her credit reports, celebrating how she was building back up, excited that she would no longer be turned away from housing due to her record. I listened to a client describe the increased services and scale that his contracting business could achieve now that he would not be barred from popular industry websites or denied jobs because of his record. I heard grandparents describe how excited they were to finally be able to participate in their grandchildren's school trips and recreational activities.

Every client's case was unique, their story singular – how they got to where they were, including the fact that they had a criminal record, was never the same. What my client's had in common was a resilience and determination to return to serving their families, their communities, and themselves. They each wanted to rebuild their lives in a sustainable and meaningful way – to no longer be defined by their record.

It was an incredibly meaningful opportunity to be able to support such a diverse, committed, and creative group of people. Thank you to Equal Justice America for making this possible.

Sincerely,  
Talia Lanckton