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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1:

Today wraps up my two-weeks acting as a law clerk at Blue Ridge Legal Services in Harrisonburg, Virginia. I feel lucky to have landed in an office where I have quickly been invited into the fold and have hit the ground running in regard to assisting attorneys with a variety of issues including housing law, family, law, and consumer protection and bankruptcy.

I've gotten the opportunity to attend hearings in two different counties and in the JDR court, General District Court, and Circuit Court. I have enjoyed meeting other attorneys in the area and talking with clients. I especially enjoy spending time with clients at the court and answering their questions about what the process is going to look like. I know for them, especially in housing and family law issues, this entire process is incredibly stressful and scary so I hope that I am somewhat of a help to soothe their nerves.

I have also spent time organizing and summarizing evidence for other Blue Ridge attorneys. I've gotten a crash course in protective orders, child custody, determining child support and no-fault divorces. Every day I am amazed by the work that the attorneys here put in for their clients and the ways people can flourish when they are listened to and given a chance to explain their story.

Update 2:

The past two weeks have been busy. I got the opportunity to attend a bar meeting lunch with the Rockingham County bar association and get to meet more area attorneys, some of who I've seen in court before.

The most exciting thing that has happened recently is that after spending a lot of time researching and writing a brief about a new defense in housing law involving the necessity of disclosures of tenant's rights under the Violence Against Women Act. After doing research, collaborating with another legal aid office, and drafting a brief, I got to see my arguments used in front of a judge in court. After this, I was able to incorporate what I learned from the other attorney's rebuttal into my brief. This is exciting because I feel like I'm becoming a mini expert in the office about how to utilize this new defense.



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I also got to do work reading the incoming House Bills from the Virginia legislature and updating the office's notes about the Manufactured Home Lot Rental Act. There's some exciting clarifications that are more lenient to tenants coming down the pipe that will go into effect of July 1st.

Update 3:

The past two weeks have felt very full—even though one of them was only three days because of the fourth of July. Short weeks like last week always remind me of why I went to law school; this summer is the first time in my post-college career where I've gotten holidays off because I was farmworker prior to going to law school. I'm hoping to continue on a path in my legal career that can help advocate for people to get better working conditions and benefits wherever they work.

These past two weeks I spent a good amount of time engaging with the wide world of bankruptcy, specifically chapter 7 bankruptcy, which can be helpful to give people a clean slate after things such as credit card debt hound them for years. Bankruptcy filing takes a lot of specialized information, so I spent time making sure we had what we needed from clients and then letting them know what other information we still needed.

As always, I worked on many housing cases. I also got trained in writing the closing memos for the office and so have been taking care of that for attorneys. Something interesting I got to look into was the intersection of Airbnb/ short term rentals and their intersection with landlord tenant law. This was interesting to me because in undergrad I did a fair amount of work analyzing the growth of Airbnb's and their effect on local housing availability in Upstate New York.

Update 4:

In the past few weeks I've continued to work more on landlord/tenant cases. I also spent a fair amount of time engaging with the Virginia Manufactured Home Lot Act, which governs mobile home lots. Before this summer I didn't know there were special laws designed for this type of housing, and it's been really interesting to learn about the specific legal concerns and common problems with this type of housing. Much of my time this summer has involved creating arguments about an Unlawful Detainer lacking subject matter jurisdiction because the landlord did not provide the tenant with the necessary Tenants Rights and Responsibilities form. In the past two weeks, I've been engaging with the VMHLA's version of that document.

I also got to attend a webinar about community lawyering with a special focus on building relationships at mobile home parks, which was really interesting. I'm grateful for the opportunities to connect with other attorneys around the state that are also interested in public interest issues and community lawyering.

I also got to work on some consumer protection projects- the office has been seeing an increased number of car and rental scams this summer. I got to work on a bill of particulars for a defective car that we are arguing was misrepresented to an illiterate client.

Update 5:

This summer I gained a lot insight into the legal ecosystem of rural communities and widening access to justice gap. I've learned a lot about a wide variety of types of law, but was able to focus largely on housing law, which was goal of mine this summer. I learned a lot about



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landlord/tenant law and feel a lot more confident in my ability to discuss issues within housing law.

One of the things I'm most excited about this summer was working on a brief about an emerging issue in housing law and collaborating between multiple legal aid offices in the state to develop a strong body of information to work on this defense. The issue involves the intersection of the Violence Against Women Act's effect on housing law. There are latent federal requirements regarding eviction processes from federally-funding housing providers. Most housing providers have not been following these required procedures. That may sound very vague and boring, but I swear it's interesting.

I'm excited to go back to school and hopefully compare what I was working on to other people who interned in various legal offices across the state. It will be interesting to hear what different offices focus on and what their most common strategies are. I hope to keep in touch with this office and use the skills I learned this summer in my school's Access to Justice clinic in the spring.

I'm very thankful for the attorneys at Blue Ridge who have given me so much of their time and energy. They have been very inclusive with involving and including me in their various projects.

I am also grateful to have had the opportunity to spend time in a new place and explore a new region of the state. The Shenandoah valley is a very beautiful and interesting place. I've been really amazed by the diversity and community within Harrisonburg, and I am thankful to have had this summer in the valley. It's clear to me that there is a great need for more legal service providers for low-income people in this area. I think it is an important opportunity for law students to experience working in rural areas, because the impact is easily felt by the community.