



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Gerardo Escalera Cardoso
LAW SCHOOL	University of Richmond School of Law
ORGANIZATION	Blue Ridge Legal Services

Final Reflection:

My name is Gerardo Escalera Cardoso, and I was an Equal Justice America Fellow this past summer. I am a student at the University of Richmond School of Law in the Class of 2027, and I interned with Blue Ridge Legal Services in Harrisonburg, VA. Blue Ridge Legal Services is a nonprofit legal aid society that provides free civil legal services to low-income residents of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

My internship with Blue Ridge Legal Services is an experience that I will never forget. In my time with Blue Ridge, I mainly worked on landlord-tenant disputes and consumer protection actions. I spent a lot of time conducting legal research for memos on a variety of issues. For example, one of my research assignments helped craft an argument for why a client has a life estate claim in a property that she was being evicted from; this is still being litigated in Circuit Court after a positive reception at the General District Court. In addition to research memos, I also drafted Bills of Particulars, Grounds of Defense, and motions for my supervising attorney that were used in court. I also had the opportunity to meet with many clients during initial consultations and meetings in preparation for trial.

While I did learn a lot about the law itself, I also learned a lot about the realities involved in the everyday practice of the law. Particularly in the public interest sector, clients often seek legal advice as an after-the-fact reactionary measure when their legal options are drastically narrowed. This is a much-too-often occurrence that is a result of various factors but, principally, a scarcity of access to affordable legal services and a general lack of education on legal matters. Because of these common circumstances, I quickly learned that, in public interest work, victories may not always be outright wins but an outcome that is the lesser of two evils. This does not



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necessarily mean that attorneys in the public interest sector never achieve outright wins. I was proud to help my supervising attorney win a trial for unlawful detainer, where we successfully prevented an Army veteran from being evicted for the sole reason of getting into an argument with his roommates. However, I also did learn to appreciate the little victories, such as getting an unlawful detainer dismissed because of a landlord's failure to conform with civil procedure and buying our client a little more time to get their affairs in order, despite knowing that the unlawful detainer would inevitably be filed again.

The best part of my internship with Blue Ridge was the client interaction. I loved being able to meet with clients, learning their stories and understanding why and how they needed our help. Many of our clients were kind and appreciative of my help, and I will never forget how two clients particularly thanked me for the hours that I spent working on their cases. I appreciate Equal Justice America for providing me with a stipend that put me in a better financial position where I could more easily intern with Blue Ridge Legal Services and contribute all that I did. Thank you for all of your help and support.