

8 October 2016

Mr. Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would like to express my gratitude to Equal Justice America for the grant that I received to support my unpaid, full-time internship at Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP) this past summer. Without the grant, I would have been unable to pay my rent or commute across the city each day to NLSP's office in Ward 7. I sincerely appreciate the opportunities that this grant afforded me.

One of my favorite parts of my work this summer was the opportunity to work with clients, which I fortunately had a lot of. After conducting legal research for several cases, I was able to sit in with attorneys handling those cases when they met with clients. Those meetings gave meaning to the work I had done by putting a face and a story with it. For instance, in one case, I researched DC's rent control laws and how the landlord's failure to register properly under them might affect his proposed sale of the building and the client's (tenant's) right to buy the property under the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA). After meeting with the tenant and explaining to her the results of my research, I had a renewed appreciation for how laws that may seem dry or technical impact people's lives in a vital way.

I also spent several mornings over the course of the summer staffing the Small Claims Resource Center at Small Claims Court. The Center's purpose was to provide legal information and help claimants fill out petitions, which they then filed pro se. It was frustrating to me not to be able to do more, but more frustrating was the fact that many of the claims were for cases that had already been decided—the losing party had never paid the damages the court said they owed, and now it was up to the plaintiff to spend more of his or her time in court and money on filing fees to enforce the judgment. It was a good reminder to me that even a successful outcome in the courtroom may not mean justice for my clients.

Finally, I also spent several of my afternoons canvassing door-to-door with another of NLSP's attorneys. She was working on a project dedicated to increasing homeownership and keeping families in their homes in Wards 7 and 8. To get the project off the ground, we went door to door letting people know about the resources we offered and the rights they had as homeowners. It was interesting talking to homeowners and learn more about the neighborhood through their eyes—we talked to one man who had lived in his home since he bought it over fifty years ago! He had seen a lot of changes over the years, and hearing about them was fascinating.

The clients that I met this summer and the work I did for NLSP will stay with me for years to come. Thank you again for the generous grant, without which I would not have been able to work full time at NLSP without pay!

Best,



Elizabeth Leman
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