

August 31, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My Equal Justice America Fellowship this summer allowed me to be a part of a truly rewarding experience at Central Virginia Legal Aid Society (CVLAS) in Charlottesville, VA. By the end of my eleven weeks there, I felt that I became a better writer, oral communicator, and legal thinker. I also left feeling like I had effectively helped my clients and am incredibly thankful for the opportunity.

One client that often comes to my mind when I reflect upon this summer is a woman who had her bank account frozen and had received a summons for a garnishment hearing. After reviewing her financial information, I realized that she was garnishment proof, and her account should not have been frozen. My supervising attorney and I then filed a motion to quash. I also had the client come back into the office so I could explain how to deal with debt collectors and how she can prioritize her debts.

The client's issue ended up being resolved outside of court. I felt that she left our office better educated on how to handle her debt. She was a senior citizen living off a pension who had gotten into debt because of medical issues. She was seeking guidance on how to handle debts as much as she was seeking help on her frozen account. I told her how to communicate with debt collectors and her bank, and I felt she left the office confident that she could handle her situation. She no longer seemed overwhelmed.

A second memorable client at CVLAS was a domestic violence victim who was seeking custody of her child from the father. Similar to the client I spoke of above, this second client came into our office overwhelmed and lacking any confidence. She seemed to have little faith in our legal system and hesitant to share information with us. As I developed a relationship with her, I began to learn more about her story. This helped me understand why she would be easily persuaded by the demands of the child's father.

At one point this summer, she contacted me and I had the impression that she was truly willing to give up custody. She had mentioned doing something like this before, always as a side thought, but this time it seemed genuine. My supervising attorney and I knew that this was not in her best interest and decided to fully advise her of her legal options. After doing so, we explained to her that the justice system can actually help her, not just harm her. In addition, we told her about several community resources that could help get her on her feet to living an independent

life with her daughter. It was during this conversation that I realized legal aid lawyers not only provide legal services, but also serve as counselors to the indigent community.

My summer at CVLAS provided me with extensive practical experience. I also learned a great deal about the necessity of legal services to indigent clients. Whether it's a home, financial stability, or maintaining custody, legal aid lawyers help indigent clients protect their livelihoods. I am so grateful that I could be a part of providing such services this summer through my Equal Justice America Fellowship.

Sincerely,

Ashley Hart

Washington and Lee University School of Law, Class of 2015

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August 29, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Ashley Hart worked as a law clerk for me this past summer. Her responsibilities included interviewing clients, writing memoranda and client letters, drafting pleadings and motions, and conducting discovery. She also had the opportunity to observe me and my fellow staff attorney, Palma Pustilnik, argue in court. Overall, Ashley worked on over twenty cases in our office and helped me close several of them.

A majority of Ashley's work was in consumer law and housing law. She assisted me with several used car cases, where she had to navigate the Uniform Commercial Code, Truth in Lending Act, Virginia Consumer Protection Act, and the Magnusson-Moss Warranty Act. She also worked with clients who were in debt, and were either being garnished or filing for bankruptcy.

Her housing cases included working with clients who wanted to terminate their leases early, clients who had disputes with their landlords over repairs, and clients who had been served with unlawful detainers. Oftentimes she had to work with the Virginia Residential Landlord Tenant Act and the Virginia Landlord Tenant Act. I also had her thoroughly read leases to fully understand our clients' options.

The rest of Ashley's work was in family law. The main project she did in family law was assisting with the discovery and trial preparation for a child custody case. She sat in on several client meetings, and helped draft a request for admission, interrogatories, and document requests. Additional family law work included interviewing clients and drafting pleadings for uncontested no-fault divorces, and assisting clients who sought protective orders.

Outside of her work with clients, she also attended task force meetings with me on consumer, housing, and family law. At these meetings, she would observe legal aid lawyers from across the state discussing current legal issues in these fields. These meetings also introduced her to the importance of legislative advocacy for indigent clients.



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I was greatly impressed with Ashley's work and professionalism. She is a self-starter and was able to handle a large caseload with minimal supervision in our busy legal aid office. That being said, Ashley knew the appropriate questions to ask of the attorneys. Ashley's legal research and writing skills are first rate. Most of the letters and pleadings she drafted for me needed little or no revision. I felt confident that when I handed Ashley a new case, that she would thoroughly interview the client and research the pertinent legal issues.

Furthermore, Ashley clearly cares about our clients and has a passion for the work we do. She was a great asset to CVLAS this summer and we are very grateful to Equal Justice America for funding her fellowship.

Sincerely,

Robin Edwards