

August 31, 2008

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I was afforded the opportunity to work as a law clerk at the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) in Oakland, California. NCYL is a public interest organization that specializes in education, foster care, juvenile justice, health and mental health care for children, particularly those in poverty. Working at NCYL was an incredible experience for me because I grew up passionate about children and interested in their holistic well-being. The population that I focused on, foster care children, especially needs to receive holistic care since their childhoods are often fraught with instability. Simply providing a child with basic necessities like food, clothes, and shelter is not sufficient and may have legal implications. I better understand this after working with NCYL attorneys on an impact litigation case.

The class action lawsuit was brought on behalf of Nevada foster children who are in the state's care and custody. It alleges that state and local officials violated constitutional and statutory rights of plaintiffs, including the rights to a case plan, an individualized education plan, health care, and appropriate mental health care. The named plaintiffs were individual children and sibling groups who received substandard care while in the state's care. It is ironic that children are removed from their primary caregivers for reasons such as child endangerment only to be placed in a foster care system so broken that some children die from preventable deaths while in the state's care. Other children exhibit serious developmental delays and develop psychosocial problems. Even worse is the fact that children often are removed from caring family members who provided care in lieu of their parents. It was extremely disturbing to learn about the plight of these specific children, but I gained insight into the plight of America's foster children and their families. Thus, it was empowering to translate their stories into a compelling legal action.

From a personal perspective, the litigation brought civil procedure to life. It was civil procedure in action! The abstract debate between procedural and substantive rights quickly became a reality. I enjoyed learning firsthand about the class action process because each stage is comprised of unique legal arguments, from filing the initial complaint to an amended complaint and from filing a motion for class certification to a renewed motion to class certification. The named plaintiffs and putative class members served as motivation throughout the summer. Their lives matter, so the litigation matters. This simple truth encouraged me while I conducted legal research, wrote memoranda, revised briefs, and assisted in document review.

My experience at NCYL strengthened my interest in child and family welfare and reinforced my belief in law as a tool for social change. I was especially inspired by a poignant picture featuring children, which hangs on NCYL's conference room wall. Written on the

picture is the phrase: “Kids like us, need lawyers like you.” That picture and those words will stick with me throughout my legal career. I am grateful for my experience at NCYL and the support provided by Equal Justice America.

Sincerely,

Ashley R. Moore

Ashley R. Moore
Harvard Law School
Class of 2010