

August 30, 2010

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My name is Bevlynn Sledge, and I am a second-year student at Cornell Law School. The generosity of Equal Justice America made it possible for me to spend my 1L summer working with Attorneys for Children (AFC), a non-profit organization that represents children in custody, abuse, neglect, delinquency, and other similar cases.

Over the course of the summer I worked with a number of children who were often scared and confused about the legal process and the changes happening within their families. Part of my work involved interviewing children about their home and family lives, and any concerns regarding their living situations. It was extremely rewarding when a child came into the office quiet, closed-off, and perhaps afraid, but then gradually opened up over the course of the interview. In many instances, I found that the child felt voiceless, helplessly strung along in proceedings affecting things like where they lived or went to school. I assured each child that I would be their voice, although I could not promise that the judge would always listen. This simple assurance provided visible relief, however, as each child left the interview more carefree and childlike than when they first arrived.

I worked on one case where the Department of Social Services alleged that two siblings needed to be separated in order to ensure the younger sibling's safety. AFC was appointed to represent the younger sibling. Shortly thereafter, he was removed from his mother's home and placed into foster care. AFC disagreed with the Department of Social Services' decision to remove the child, and advocated strongly for his return home. Moreover, the child wanted to be home by his birthday because he did not want to spend his birthday in foster care.

One of the first rules I learned is that we cannot promise the child that things will happen by a certain date, if they even happen at all, but I set a private goal for myself to get the child home by his birthday. As the weeks went by and his birthday neared, very little progress was made because the parties could not agree on exactly what actions needed to be taken before the child could return home.



A few weeks before the child's birthday, I attended a pretrial settlement conference for the case on my own. The mother and her attorney were present as were the sibling and his attorney. Department of Social Services attorneys were also present, and each side engaged in a tug of war attempting to get me to say things completely in line with one position or the other. Meanwhile, neither side could agree on how or when my client would return home. As the meeting ended, I felt like nothing was accomplished, but then both sides thanked me for consistently advocating a middle-ground approach where all the parties made certain concessions in order to get my client home as soon as possible. Ultimately, both sides agreed on that approach. The child was returned home just in time for his birthday, which was the same time that my internship ended.

I thank Equal Justice America for its Fellowship, which made my participation in this enriching and rewarding summer internship possible.

Sincerely,

Bevllynn Joann Sledge

Cornell Law School 2012

CITIZENS CONCERNED *for* CHILDREN, Inc.
Attorneys for Children
121 East Buffalo St.
Ithaca, New York 14850
(607) 277-3198 Fax: (607) 277-0246

Diane B. Withiam, *Attorney*
Stephen C. Davey, *Attorney*
Keli C. Pia-Miller, *Social Worker*
Sheryl D. Kumpf, *Legal Assistant*

August 31, 2010

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

By email to katie@equaljusticeamerica.org (*please advise if mailed copy is required)

Re: Evaluation of Bevlynn Joann Sledge, fellowship with Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Our office had the pleasure of having Jo Sledge as our summer intern. We provide legal services to children in local Family Court in the primary areas of abuse, neglect, custody, visitation, person in need of supervision, and juvenile delinquency. Our staff consists of two attorneys, a social worker, and an administrative/legal assistant.

We offer our student interns the opportunity to observe the full range of court proceedings (and this summer was particularly full of trials), assist in case review and preparation, observe and assist in interviews, attend home visits with our social worker, and research legal issues.

Jo came to us after her first year of law school. She exhibited an enquiring mind and a quick grasp of the law relevant to this practice area. Although she had not formally studied family law before her time here, she showed an understanding of this area of law quickly.

Jo obtained certification from our Appellate Department to practice as a student under supervision and was thus afforded the opportunity to cover two initial appearance court days.

Jo's skills are excellent. She was efficient in her research. She ably and quickly grasped and integrated facts and law. She wrote two closing arguments for me; her writing is clear and precise as are her reasoning and analysis.

Jo delivered all assignments promptly. Her work habits were excellent. She was a superb fit for the

office, working comfortably with all.

We truly enjoyed having her here and are grateful for the contribution she made this summer. Thank you for your support in this.

Sincerely,

Diane B. Withiam