

August 31, 2016

TO:

Mr. Dan Ruben,  
Executive Director, Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road,  
Midlothian, Virginia, 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I would like to begin by thanking Equal Justice America for its assistance in allowing me to serve as a legal intern with LAF (formerly the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago) in their Consumer Practice Group. Without your generous assistance, I would not have been able to work for such a prestigious legal aid organization in the Midwest, and more than that, to experience almost every level of public interest law and advocacy.

When I came to LAF, I came with my understanding of assisting low income clients on a theoretical level. While I decided to go to law school specifically to become a public interest attorney, the idea of litigation and serving individual clients did not always factor into my thinking, a support for greater policy goals. Ironically, within my first day as an intern, I learned quickly how important helping on a single client could matter. As I assisted my supervisor with the case of a client who was facing eviction, I noticed some details on a document which not only would prove our client's assertions to the validity of her tenancy, but could indicate possible forgery. And it struck me: a bit of careful sleuthing and basic legal work could save a woman's home. Saving her home would keep her off the street, would save her family anguish, would keep one more person from suffering. It was in that moment that I realized that providing legal services is not merely a good cause: it saves lives and livelihoods.

Much of my work dealt with research and client outreach concerning bankruptcy, foreclosures, and other consumer protection. I had the opportunity to work on routine motions, detailed briefs, and administrative documents which helped to readjust bankruptcy payments, assert consumer rights, and ensure that our clients could pay off their debts while being able to provide for themselves and/or their families. Indeed, a mundane piece of research could yield great results. For example, finding out how a client could change the holder of a utility account could get her children enrolled in school by establishing residency. It was instances like that which showed me that there are often few tasks which are not too small to help a client through a rough patch.

Yet, even beyond legal work, I came to understand that a key part of public interest work was simply in reassuring clients and serving as much as a counsel as an advocate. In one matter, I accompanied my supervisor and our client to a meeting concerning her bankruptcy. When it became clear that her plan would likely not be feasible, my supervisor and I both maintained calm and cool demeanors, and tried to give her solutions to keep her finances in order despite the burden. Our client went from being highly agitated and afraid to feeling prepared enough to make an effort to tackle her debt despite the possible legal outcome. As is often the case in public interest work, especially legal aid, success can often be hit or miss; but making a client

feel empowered and knowledgeable in spite of being in a stressful situation can matter as much as a successful ruling on a motion or a trial win.

Perhaps the most exciting occurrence of my time at LAF was accompanying one of our attorneys to a hearing which contemplated a city ordinance which would prevent the city from working with companies that use mandatory arbitration clauses. These clauses often place consumers at such a financial disadvantage that any chance at meaningful recovery is moot. While my assistance in her testimony did not tackle one particular client, I realized how her expertise was informed not merely by economic theory or public policy, but having served client after client, seeing how difficult it could be for someone who is already at an economic disadvantage to achieve restitution. I, myself, had spoken with clients who had been taken advantage of by companies, such as a client who was being sued for a repair loan that she maintained that she paid, while the small repair company said she did not. Day after day, these kinds of cases come across the desks of LAF attorneys, and their counterparts around the country; and these cases exemplify how even one more public interest attorney can help thousands.

I came to LAF wanting to do public interest law; I left LAF wanting to become a public interest attorney. And it was the financial support of Equal Justice America which made it possible for me to take an internship that I would have been totally unable to accept. Helping even one law student to do the kind of necessary public interest advocacy and litigation which is ever more in demand could one day save the home of an elderly woman, help a woman provide an education for her family, or provide the impetus to make our laws better serve those in our society who are without means or without help. My experience with LAF taught me that without helping live clients one by one, the greater battles for social justice will not have as much meaning. And it is to Equal Justice America's credit that many like myself can have even a small opportunity to learn these lessons and start our paths to make social change real.

Thank you for your assistance, and for all that you do for the field of public interest law.

Sincerely

Frank Pucci,  
J.D. Candidate, Chicago-Kent College of Law,  
Class of 2017



Equal justice starts here.

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August 26, 2016

Mr. Dan Ruben  
Equal Justice America

RE: Frank Pucci's Evaluation

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to evaluate the fellowship of Frank Pucci, who worked at LAF (f/k/a Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago) as a 2016 Summer Intern. Frank Pucci was very helpful and practical. When he started, I had a research assignment. He was very thorough and quick with his response. In addition, he pointed out helpful information within the documents, which had been overlooked.

Frank attended court with me on numerous occasions throughout the summer. He was always very helpful with his input and gave very insightful observations. Frank was a fantastic person to brainstorm with and come up with practical solutions. Frank also gave very good comments about addressing some of clients' life problems such as dealing with addictions and the clients' abilities to overcome their problems in view of their circumstances.

Frank was always prompt in attending court and was always dressed very professionally. In fact, Frank went with me to the IRS, and I believe Frank's professional attire helped to expedite our visit so that I obtained the necessary information from the IRS employee with a very thorough response to our request.

In regards to Frank's interactions with our clients, many of whom are indigent, the clients seemed very comfortable with Frank. Frank attended court on one occasion

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when the client was present and when the judge was very adversarial towards me. Frank maintained his composure and helped to keep a calm atmosphere by reassuring the client that things happen like this and not to be alarmed. Frank seems to be accustomed to dealing with chaotic situations while maintaining his composure.

Frank also helped me with our Bankruptcy Pro Se Help Desk, where we give pro se advice. Again, Frank was very reassuring to the clients and helped to address their myriad of problems.

I also liked the way Frank sought out a variety of experiences this summer. Frank attended a testimonial by one of our Consumer attorneys, who was advocating on behalf of consumers against arbitrations. Frank was very excited about his experience and seemed even more inspired to continue to work on behalf of low-income people.

Frank was very polite and very personable. Working with Frank this summer was a very pleasant experience. Frank seemed genuinely concerned about the well-being and success of our clients, many of whom are facing very challenging and difficult experiences (sometimes the result of lack of income and many times due to poor judgment). It was truly a delightful experience to supervise Frank this summer. I believe that Frank had many experiences that will help to shape his future as an attorney.

Thank you for helping to make this opportunity possible for Frank through your financial contribution. If you have any questions, concerns or need any documents, please do not hesitate to call me at (312) 347-8343.

Sincerely,

Barbara Richardson  
Senior Attorney

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