

August 31, 2013

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a 2L at the University of Richmond School of Law and am writing to thank you for the stipend I received from Equal Justice America. Through the aid I received from this stipend, I was able to pursue an unpaid 10-week internship at the Legal Aid Justice Center in Richmond, VA.

Legal Aid Justice Center is a legal aid office in the heart of Richmond serving low-income clients in immigration, education, consumer, housing, and employment matters. LAJC also does advocacy and research on juvenile matters and other issues affecting low-income communities. During my time at LAJC, I worked mostly with the Just Children program, a program within LAJC that works on educational advocacy for children with disabilities and children involved in the court system. Although there were many cases and clients that affected me, two clients in particular profoundly impacted me.

One case involved a child whom I worked with all summer on educational advocacy issues. While this child had significant behavioral issues throughout his short life in school, I never saw this aggressive side of him. Instead, in my many interactions with him, I saw a unique and artistic child who had experienced intense emotional trauma, which I believe affected his ability to respond appropriately in stressful situations. As I grew to know this child, he impressed me with his intelligence and creativity, and I wondered at the education system that saw such a different side of him.

At one point during the summer, this child had to go to a hearing in front of the local school board where he lived. Though the attorney with LAJC would speak before the board, this child would also have to speak about an aggressive incident at school in front of a group of intimidating adults. Aware that he was nervous, I encouraged him to draw a picture as we waited in the lobby of the school board office. He drew an amazingly colorful and detailed flower that filled the page, once again impressing me with his attention to detail and imagination. Although the hearing was not quite as successful as we hoped, I do think that drawing before the hearing helped calm him down, and I was encouraged by the connection we made as he drew. Because of this connection, and because I worked so diligently on his case throughout the summer and learned so much about his life story, he is one who I still think of and hope deeply for his future success.

Another client whom I was profoundly touched by was a young man, almost exactly my age, who came to our office seeking assistance in obtaining his birth certificate. This man had little contact with his family and had spent most of his life without his birth

certificate. He had attempted to obtain a copy through almost every imaginable source, despite his limited resources, with no luck. Because he did not have a birth certificate, he was unable to get a license or participate in work or school. I was determined to help him, thinking at first that this would be much easier than it eventually would be. For two weeks at the end of my internship I contacted every office I could find, again with no luck. This man had a complicated life history that prohibited him from obtaining his birth certificate from usual means, and eventually I had to think of more creative methods. I then wrote every legislator in the relevant states, state and national, as well as the Governor. A few weeks at the end of my internship, I received word that one had listened, and had cut through the red tape to ensure that this man received his birth certificate. Hearing that, and knowing that I might have made a difference through hard work on his behalf, was incredibly fulfilling.

In addition to working on these cases, I did research for all the attorneys on housing, education, consumer, employment, and immigration law. I wrote letters, spoke and met with clients, organized files, and attended community meetings. I am now a passionate advocate for issues I knew nothing about before, including housing and immigration. I welcomed this opportunity to learn and make a difference, and was reassured in the process that advocating for low-income and disadvantaged communities is what I want to do in my career.

My newfound understanding of issues that affect low-income communities will be incredibly valuable to me as I pursue a career in public interest law. Thank you for the opportunity to experience this internship.

Sincerely,

Cassie Powell
University of Richmond School of Law, Class of 2016
(Dual Degree 4 year JD/ MSW program)

JUSTCHILDREN

A Program of the

LEGAL AID JUSTICE CENTER

Lisa A. Bennett
Attorney at Law

September 3, 2013

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

Re: Report on Summer Employment of Cassie Powell

Dear Mr. Ruben:

The Legal Aid Justice Center's Richmond office was fortunate that Cassie Powell was able to obtain funding from Equal Justice America to work with us for 10 weeks this summer. We did not have the funds to hire law students and thus, without your intervention, she would have not been able to assist us. Our office provides free legal services to low income persons in civil cases with specific emphasis in cases involving special education, housing, consumer and employment in Richmond and the surrounding counties.

Cassie was able to quickly learn the office procedures for screening clients for eligibility and for triaging their legal issues for emergencies for appointments or immediate assistance. While our office manager was on vacation, our entire staff and all of the law students including Cassie rotated in fulfilling that position and thus, she was able to experience first-hand the many challenges of dealing with difficult people, with a new and difficult case management system, and the need to juggle multiple tasks.

Cassie spent some time with all the lawyers in the office although she primarily focused on education and juvenile justice issues. Cassie observed a number of hearings in a variety of settings including Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, General District and Circuit court, administrative proceedings before the Virginia Employment Commission and school based Individualized Education Plan meetings.

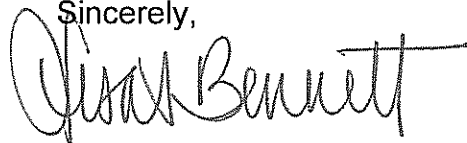
Cassie interviewed numerous clients on the phone, in person and on a home visit with a variety of substantive issues. She conducted legal and factual research, drafted pleadings and other correspondence, assisted in constructing a theory of the case and prepared parties and witnesses for trial. As the summer progressed, her confidence level improved as well as her efficiency.

Cassie enhanced her legal education while working in our office and proved to be a valuable resource to the attorneys for which she worked. She gained experience in

interviewing and counseling clients, discussing and developing case strategies, obtaining factual information, maintaining case files, and balancing a busy profession with personal life. Such skills cannot be fully learned in the classroom. Cassie is amongst the very best and brightest students who have work with us and any firm in the public interest law community would be fortunate to have her join their staff.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa A. Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lisa A. Bennett
Attorney at Law