

August 29, 2015

Dan Ruben  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you for the opportunity to take an unpaid internship with the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law in Washington, D.C. The Center focuses mostly on legal issues that affect children; however, that includes a large parents' attorney group within the CCL.

I was tasked with working with two of the ABA's attorneys and the immigration initiative. The CCL is creating short guides for various states to help with the confusion and lack of guidance surrounding what to do when you encounter a child without lawful status in the United States. The intersection of child welfare and immigration presents an interesting difficulty because children are often first identified as without lawful status by social workers or child welfare attorneys who do not have much knowledge of the various types of relief available to those children. The guides provide a list of federal relief options, as well as a section devoted to in-state support options, policies, and procedures. The hope is that in-state child welfare attorneys will be able to identify relief options more quickly with the help of the guide, as well as locate immigration attorneys to assist with the logistics of filing for relief.

In addition to the immigration initiative, I also assisted with the National Reunification Celebration. Many people have heard of Adoption Month or Foster Child/Parent Month, but few have heard of Reunification Month. That is because, historically, reunification has not been celebrated as widely in the United States. To change that, the ABA solicits nominations for professionals, parents, and children who assisted with or were personally successful in reuniting a family. I conducted 10 interviews with incredibly interesting parents and professionals to learn about their stories and celebrate them on the ABA website.

One of the nominations we received was for the Gordon Family. Please note that Gordon is a pseudonym that the family wished to use in order to maintain privacy. Sara Gordon, a 19-year old woman with developmental disabilities, had her newborn baby taken away from her by Child Protective Services while in the hospital because of her disabilities. To make a long story short, the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights, issued a joint letter of finding noting that the state of Massachusetts was discriminating against Ms. Gordon based on her disabilities and, for the first time, expanded the Americans with Disabilities Act to parents with disabilities. They ordered state Child Protective Service agency to return the daughter to the family or face prosecution.

Overall, it was a fantastic summer where I gained a lot of knowledge on the child welfare system in America. Thank you for this opportunity and good luck in all of your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ottman  
Catholic University, Columbus School of Law  
Candidate for J.D. in 2017