

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

August 29, 2015

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for awarding me the Equal Justice America Fellowship. I am extremely grateful for your organization's stipend, which made my fellowship experience possible.

A contributing factor in my decision to attend law school involved my desire to help the less fortunate. I moved to this country when I was seven years old. My family was considered low-income and we lacked many resources before we were able to establish ourselves. We were once recipients of the help from charities similar to Catholic Charities.

Once I learned about the Catholic Charities Legal Network (CCLN) and the various works they performed I was determined to be a part of that organization. I was excited to participate in their summer internship after learning that CCLN offered free or affordable legal aid to low-income persons seeking assistance in areas such as but not limited to housing, employment, and family law.

I was made aware that the operation of CCLN is fairly simple: Clients call the free telephone-intake line which is staffed by volunteers who will take down their information and determine if they are eligible to receive CCLN's legal services. If found eligible through the preliminary screening the client is then scheduled for an in-person intake. During the in-person intake, which is staffed by volunteer attorneys, the attorneys will compile and take notes of the important aspects of the client's case. The final step is determining how the organization can help the client, which is done by the CCLN staff attorneys. CCLN tries to place the case with a pro bono attorney. Unfortunately, since CCLN relies heavily on volunteer attorneys, there is never a guarantee that CCLN can place every case with a pro bono attorney. In those cases, the staff attorneys will work on finding another organization to which they refer the client.

Before my internship, I was informed that CCLN received many Spanish-speaking clients and they were searching for bilingual law student interns to serve as translators for these clients. I was eager and delighted to use my Spanish skills in this capacity. During my internship, I was able to take part in every step mentioned above. My experience was very rewarding. I took part in the telephone intake line, especially when a Spanish-speaker called. Often, during the telephone intake process, the Clients would express their relief when I informed them that I would sit as a translator and they did not need to worry about finding their own translator. During in-person intake, I would also sit in as a translator. Additionally, I would be asked to call


the Spanish-speaking clients to communicate the status of their cases or to obtain more information from them.

If there were no phone or in-person intakes, I would review cases by looking over the information and documents taken during in-person intake in order to determine if more information was needed from the clients. This was an important part of the process since finding our clients an attorney was dependent on having adequate information about their cases. During my time, I saw a variety of cases. Including bankruptcy, child custody, landlord and tenant dispute cases.

One case I was able to work on, through the entire process was regarding a disabled senior citizen. "Nancy" came to the in-person intake with her caseworker and her aide. Nancy's caseworker, a Catholic Charities employee, had sought help from CCLN after an incident Nancy was involved in. Nancy lived in a senior home with a group of other women. One day, as she walked to the bathroom she slipped and fell on the toilet. Her weight broke the toilet and caused a leak. The bathroom did not have a handicapped rail installed. The senior home issued her a bill for the damages in the bathroom. Upon hearing this, the attorney conducting the in-person intake and I were concerned that a building management that targets seniors did not provide hand railings in the bathrooms. After the in-person intake, my supervising attorneys and I worked on compiling the information of the case and finding a pro bono attorney for Nancy. Luckily, we were able to find a pro bono attorney who was just as concerned for Nancy as we were. Nancy, who was disabled and unemployed, would not have been able to afford an attorney on her own. Her only source of income was through Social Security. It was a satisfying accomplishment to find Nancy an attorney who would help her at no cost.

The opportunity to work with attorneys who were eager to help less fortunate clients and advocate for them was inspirational. Many of the clients that came in for help were concerned and stressed about their legal problems. Additionally, the clients were stressed that they were not able to afford an attorney. The legal system is complex and can be daunting to people who have very little or no experience in the legal field. I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to work at CCLN and help people who would not be able to afford an attorney and guide them through the process. This has been a very rewarding experience for me. Thank you for awarding me the fellowship and making this opportunity possible.

Sincerely,



Tamara Guillen  
J.D. Candidate 2017  
Columbus School of Law  
Catholic University of America