

Christine Billy
573 Eliot Mail Center
Cambridge, MA 02138

October 18, 2006

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to thank you for the extraordinary opportunity of being a recipient of the Equal Justice America fellowship. Because of the fellowship, I was able to work as a summer intern at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to indigent New Yorkers.

I spent ten weeks working directly under a supervising attorney in the Family and Matrimonial Law unit, where I was able to assist with all aspects of the attorney's caseload. I was able to draft motions, interview clients in English and Spanish, work on discovery requests, and observe a variety of Family Court and New York Supreme Court proceedings.

The unit placed a priority on serving poor domestic violence victims, with the goal of enabling these women to empower themselves, both personally and economically, through the legal system. I assisted many domestic violence survivors with both contested and uncontested divorces, as well as with their child custody and support cases.

I was also fortunate enough to be able to participate in New York's Courtroom Advocates project. As a Courtroom Advocate, I led domestic violence victims through the harrowing and time consuming process of petitioning for an order of protection in the Bronx Family Court. It was especially rewarding to be able to stand next to these women as their case was called and speak on their behalf when their nerves failed. Being able to witness, first hand, the great anxiety and doubt that these women experienced throughout the process, and then being able to mitigate this anxiety in some way, solidified my belief in the important role that attorneys can play in the lives of their clients.

One aspect of the summer that was both rewarding and challenging was the way in which many of our clients were facing a multitude of legal needs at once. A client who came in with a custody case, might also be experiencing problems with her government benefits, her landlord, or having trouble finding daycare for a disabled child.

At times, I was able to direct such clients to other attorneys and staff at NYLAG in other units. At other times, I was able to lead the client directly to the resources she was seeking. Seeing my clients as more than just the single legal need that brought them to my desk made for an enriching summer, but also one that was at times fraught with frustration and sorrow.

The most inspiring element of my summer was the clients themselves. The strength and conviction of these women was astounding. Whether it was reliving their past traumas in preparation for a hearing, or facing their abusers in court, my clients were able to move beyond their adversity and take active steps to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

Although I am uncertain regarding the specifics of my future after graduation, I am confident that last summer at NYLAG was an invaluable means of further defining my career as a public interest lawyer. I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to Equal Justice America for awarding me this fellowship. In giving me your financial support, and in demonstrating your commitment to public interest law, you have enabled me and students like me to explore the public interest world in way that would otherwise have been a practical impossibility.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Christine Billy".

Christine Billy
Harvard Law School '08