

October 19, 2006

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

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

I want to thank Equal Justice America for the support they provided me for my summer internship at the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles (CLC). My experience over those ten weeks has solidified my intentions to work in the Los Angeles dependency system. At CLC, I worked under two case-carrying attorneys and assisted in representing minors in children's court. Having this experience in my first law school summer will allow me to truly orient much of my law education towards my goal of working as a minors' attorney.

One of the first things that I learned at my internship was that no system operates in isolation. I had a chance to see how the dependency system interacts with the delinquency system, the department of mental health, the criminal and civil courts, and even the media. Another early surprise was the child-friendly design of the courthouse itself. Every courtroom had a supply of stuffed animals for the children who came to court. Many courtrooms even had balloons or piñatas.

Unfortunately, the interesting and even friendly environment was home to many stories of families and children in crisis. I had expected to come across a few truly horrific cases during my summer, but as it turned out, almost every case made me wonder how things like this could happen in the year 2006. One case will stay with me forever. A preschool boy was not allowed to begin kindergarten because it was feared that he would be a sexual predator. He was discovered engaging in oral sex with an even younger child. The boy's behavior led teachers and counselors to discover that the boy had been sexually abused. He was both a victim and now, at age five, he was a perpetrator.

Although I frequently encountered overwhelming stories of abuse and neglect, I also worked with clients on much lighter, but still important issues. For example, one young client wanted to attend his first T-ball game, but it was on a day when he was scheduled to meet with his mother in her rehabilitation program. He asked his caretaker, but the caretaker had a stormy relationship with the mother and the social worker which hindered her communication with the social worker. The initial decision from the mother's attorney was that the boy could not miss his time with his mother. The boy's caretaker wanted the boy to miss several visits with his mother to facilitate both the game and the caretaker's schedule for the weekend. After many phone calls to many different parties, I was finally able to broker a compromise and the boy was able to attend his game. I heard he did well. I am still waiting on the pictures.

Interviewing the clients and hearing their stories took most of my time at work. I also attended court hearings, made phone calls to social workers and caretakers, wrote statements on behalf of my supervising attorneys, researched laws on name changes and birth certificate amendments, and did some trial preparation.

CLC also provided all of the interns with brown bag lunch seminars. One favorite guest speaker was Father Boyle, the founder of Homeboy Industries. He spoke about his efforts to assist reformed and recovering gang members in reclaiming their lives. We toured his offices and spoke with some of the "homeboys", many of whom were former foster kids. Hearing the stories of how some of them had slipped through the cracks made me even more determined to do what I can to contribute to a better system.

I am currently in my first year of my Masters of Social Welfare. I am pursuing a joint degree in order to gain another perspective on the system within which I want to work. I noticed a great deal of tension between the dependency attorneys and the social workers assigned to clients. I hope to play a role in improving the relationship between these two entities. Overall, I could not have asked for a better summer experience. I now have a sincere interest in taking full advantage of any educational or experiential opportunity that will help make me a better advocate for children.

Thank you,
Cynthia Reasner
UCLA School of Law, 2009