

August 12 2017

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

As an Equal Justice America summer fellow, I am pleased to inform you that my summer internship experience was both incredibly rewarding and practical. As an intern at the Center for Disability and Elder Law (CDEL) here in Chicago, I was quickly submerged in legal questions dealt mainly—although not exclusively—by the disabled and elderly. These included adult guardianship, housing, powers of attorneys, and even breach of contract issues. This is a summary of my summer internship.

My days at CDEL began by prescreening incoming calls. Daily, the center received more than sixty calls, fifteen of which were responded directly by me. And because of my bilingual skill, I was automatically routed calls from Spanish speakers. This presented an opportunity to advocate on behalf of my community by offering a different perspective often overlooked due to language barriers, such as language expressions and overall trust.

During one of the calls, I spoke with a Spanish-speaking woman who for many years was dealing with an unresolved legal issue with her home. Initially, her house was jointly owned by her and her then husband, but a few years later, her husband sold his interest. The property was now co-owned by the woman and the new buyer. The problem was that the new deed did not indicate a new joint ownership, instead, it listed the buyer as the new sole owner. Shortly after, the new “sole owner” disappeared and the woman was left to care for the property on her own, which included paying all property taxes. This was her reality for over a dozen of years until she was informed that the property was being sold without her consent. During our call, I urged the woman to gather all tax records for the last seven years showing her as the sole property tax payer. Once these documents were in my possession, I urged the center’s director to consider filing a suit to quiet title under the theory of adverse possession.

The significance of the woman’s story lied beneath the facts of her case. From the moment I began to speak with her, it was clear to me that she had been living in an oppressive state, where the men in her life attempted to control her fate. Even the legal instruments in her possession, the deed to her house, only listed her as “the wife.” Remarkably, although limited in her understanding, she was resilient and determined to get her home back.

In a similar experience, while staffing the Guardianship Help Desk at the court house (Daley Center), a caregiver came seeking assistance to bring her mother with dementia home from the

hospital. The caregiver did not understand the concept of guardianship. All she understood was the idea of bringing her mother home. Although the caregiver knew that she needed an “emergency” guardianship approval from the court, my job was to explain to her the process of such request. She was under the impression that she would leave the court with the approval the same day, but I explained to her that for the safety of all parties involved, the process required 2-3 weeks time. Disappointed, however informed, the caregiver proceeded with my assistance to complete all required documents and forms.

The story with the caregiver highlighted the importance of setting expectations and educating clients. Too often, individuals called seeking assistance with their urging matter only to discover that we were unable to assist them for a variety of reasons. Some of these callers became even more distrusting and discouraged of our legal system, as well as of legal aid organizations. However, after a brief explanation of our process, the limited resources available, callers often understood that we simply could not help everyone with their urgent matter. Furthermore, setting expectations allowed us to become more open and honest about our abilities, which furthered, I think, a higher level of trust with the community.

Perhaps the most uplifting part of my experience was drafting powers of attorney, mainly for the elderly at senior centers. This brought a sense of relief to the participants knowing that legally they were better prepared for their future. During one of the workshops, a couple came seeking assistance with drafting their powers of attorneys. Somehow, they were under the assumption that as married couples, each were their powers of attorney, and should neither become available, their children would be allowed to step in. After careful explanation, the couples realized that it would be best to draft these powers of attorney where their wishes would be stated in a legal instrument. In the end, the couple appeared relieved knowing that should anything were to happen, each were now prepared and be allowed to make decisions for the other.

Throughout this experience, I encountered various learning opportunities that allowed me to explore different areas of law. From drafting wills, and even my first Freedom of Information Request document, CDEL helped me realize the incredible impact legal aid organizations have on the underserved community, yet a tremendous need continues to exist, often to the detriment of our society. My hope is to one day help address these needs.

I sincerely appreciate your sponsorship and continued support of students seeking ways to serve our communities.

Best regards,

Salomon De Los Angeles
DePaul University College of Law
Expected Graduation Date: 2019.



Center for Disability & Elder Law

August 29, 2017

Mr. Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
Building II - Suite 204,
13540 East Boundary Road,
Midlothian, VA 23112
KATIE@EQUALJUSTICEAMERICA.ORG

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you very much for allowing the Center for Disability & Elder Law (CDEL) to host Sal De Los Angeles' fellowship for Summer, 2017. I was Mr. De Los Angeles's direct supervisor and coordinated his fellowship this summer. I was impressed with his work and his dedication to CDEL while he was with us this summer.

Since 1984, CDEL, a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) legal service organization, has been dedicated to serving the legal needs of low-income residents of Cook County who are over the age of 60 and/or those with a permanent disability. As a volunteer-based legal service, CDEL utilizes law student fellows/externs to support us in this mission. We are pleased to work with partners such as Equal Justice America to provide opportunities for deserving law school students to obtain practical legal experience while still in law school.

Mr. De Los Angeles was part of one of our most successful summer programs. Mr. De Los Angeles worked on a number of important legal matters at CDEL, including assisting with the representation of clients in landlord/tenant and other legal matters and drafted advance directives for low income seniors. Mr. De Los Angeles worked with CDEL on a number of projects, including CDEL's Senior Center Initiative (SCI), and Pro Se Adult Guardianship Help Desk located at the Circuit Court of Cook County. In addition, Mr. De Los Angeles' previous work with the Alzheimer's Association and his fluency in Spanish were especially important when working with our clients.

Thank you, once again, for allowing us to host Mr. De Los Angeles's fellowship. We look forward to working with Equal Justice America in the future. If you have any questions, please feel free contact me.

With regards,

Thomas Wendt
Legal Director
Center for Disability & Elder Law