

## **EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA- Fellowship Questionnaire Summer 2012**

### **Part 1: Letter to Mr. Dan Ruben, Executive Director**

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

This summer I worked as a summer counsel at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This was an amazing experience for me, and I learned so much this summer. At the Bureau I served as a student attorney for several low-income clients with cases in family court in both Middlesex and Suffolk counties. The most common issues included divorce, child custody, restraining orders and child support. I served as the primary case handler on every matter assigned, and was responsible for managing client contact, drafting pleadings and motions, conducting discovery, communicating with opposing counsel and advocating for my client in family court.

I thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of my job as a student attorney, particularly getting to know many new people from diverse backgrounds, both my clients and my colleagues. One of the main highlights for me this summer was getting to argue in court multiple times on behalf of my clients in front of family law judges. It was very rewarding to have so much responsibility while still in law school. A specific highlight was when I was able to negotiate an agreement for my client where her child support order was significantly increased. In that case, the opposing party and my client were never married and had two children together. However, the opposing party had only been paying child support for one of the children, even though the second child was almost 10 years old. Meeting with a probation officer in Suffolk County, my client, the opposing party and I were able to come to an agreement in which the opposing party would begin paying child support for his daughter based on his current income.

All of my clients this summer had both financial and personal issues, of varying degrees of severity, which they were dealing with. It was very humbling to see the problems that some people need to struggle with every day. At the end of the summer when I was finishing up my time at HLAB, I contacted all of my clients to let them know that I was leaving to go back to school, and that their case would be transferred to another student attorney for the fall semester. It meant a lot to me to hear many of my clients express how grateful they were to have me advocating for them over the course of the summer, and how much they appreciated my hard work on their case. I think that many of clients appreciated just having someone they could call and explain their situation too. I had a wonderful experience at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau this summer, and I thank Equal Justice America for the fellowship that I received.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Barnes

The George Washington University Law School '13