

August 7, 2008

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you for the opportunity to thank you and Equal Justice America for your assistance during my Summer Fellowship this summer. I learned so much in such a short period of time with Legal Services for Children. San Francisco is not an easy place in which to live cheaply, and the assistance I received was greatly appreciated and allowed me to be here.

During my Summer Fellowship, the two cases which were truly mine were focused on school expulsions. I helped a student and his anxious father appeal a school expulsion. They did not have representation during the expulsion hearing, and as a result, the student was expelled from the school district, and missed his senior prom and graduation, for a first time offense. I was able to work closely with the student's father in shaping an appeal brief, arguing how the school board abused its discretion in expelling the student. The county board will not decide on the appeal until September, but I was so happy to help a good student who has a bright future ahead, and to help the father feel as though he was able to right a wrong.

I was able to represent a student and his family during his expulsion hearing. The student was Samoan, living in the projects, and would not have been able to find representation elsewhere. English was not the mother's first language, and she was always busy working to keep her family afloat. I was fortunate to be able to get to know this student, who on the outside can appear to be a trouble-maker, being on probation in a matter outside of school as well, but who really has a good heart and wants to improve. Being the youngest of five boys, the student is the family's last hope for a child to graduate from high school from his family. The school district panel decided not to expel and to reinstate the student in school, making that goal more attainable.

Part of the reason I went to law school was because, as a teacher, I was only able to focus on my students' academics, despite what was going on at home. One student sticks out in my mind. One who had trouble at home, who had Child Protective Services visit the school, and who got expelled later for behavior issues. I always felt helpless in terms of helping students with problems outside of school, other than being able to available to listen. It has been a very fulfilling experience to be on the other side. To be there by the child's side when CPS is involved, to represent the child during expulsion hearings that are called for insufficient reasons.

The other major highlight of my summer experience was, oddly enough, manning the “warm” line. I do not normally enjoy talking on the phone with strangers, but being the first contact for a potential client gives you a feeling of attachment to the caller and to the case that sometimes is not possible when helping a staff attorney on a case that is already open and with a client that views you as their attorney’s intern. Often, the calls were cases in which our organization did not work, such as in custody cases that involve family law, so I would provide a referral. At other times, after consulting with the Attorney of the Day, I was able to present new cases at staff meetings to either be opened in house or to be referred to a pro bono panel. I enjoyed the process of seeing how the cases were picked up, how they were delegated within and outside of the office, and to see the follow through. I was fortunate also to be able to see how the social worker/attorney relationship worked within the office and on different kinds of cases.

The last big area in which I worked was in researching and writing on topics involving the California Education Code. I was glad I was able to practice researching legal topics and to also do some informal writing, which I did not expect to be able to do since I was working in direct client services. I found I enjoyed this aspect of my work immensely as well, which made me think that perhaps I would want to look into academic careers in addition to public interest work. I was able to provide my supervisor with arguments for or against education policies adopted by school districts and to provide thoughts on a possible bill to amend the Education Code. I enjoyed the variety of work I received.

My Summer Fellowship experience has allowed me to explore possible areas in which I would like to work in the future. I was also able to discover if San Francisco was a place I would want to live. Most of all, I was able to help out minors, who like my former students, have greater struggles than they should. The fact that I was able to talk to them, give them advice if possible, and to represent their rights, has fulfilled some of my goals upon entering law school. Thank you for helping make this opportunity possible.

Sincerely,

Frances Kim  
The University of Michigan Law School  
Juris Doctor expected May 2010