

August 29th, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I had the pleasure of working with the Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF) in Chicago, IL as a legal intern. I worked in the Children and Families Division, where I assisted victims of domestic violence in divorce, child custody, property, and protective order cases. My goals were to broaden my knowledge of family law matters, gain substantive litigation experience, and work directly with clients. I was fortunate to have excellent supervisory attorneys who ensured that my experience met all of these goals.

During my time at LAF, I was able to work on twenty-seven different cases, each of them with different substantive legal needs. I was certified to directly represent clients under Illinois Supreme Court Rule 711, and I was able to appear in court multiple times. I was able to draft petitions, responses to petitions, marital settlement agreements, allocations of parental responsibility (custody agreements), and discovery. I was also able to communicate directly with clients on a daily basis, which I found to be the most rewarding aspect of my work.

Many of my clients demonstrated the difference that an attorney can make in an individual's life. One of the first clients I worked with was an undocumented immigrant who had been severely abused by her ex-boyfriend. Because the client was undocumented, she was unable to work, and relied on her ex-boyfriend for financial support for their children. When he refused to pay any child support, her attorney was able to file a petition to hold him in contempt, and compel him to make payments. Afterwards, when his new girlfriend began to harass and threaten the client and her children, I was able to file a petition for a protective order on her behalf, which the court granted. These simple actions made an enormous impact on our client's life, and on her ability to provide a safe and stable environment for her children.

Perhaps my most interesting work involved a surprising legal issue – conflict of laws between Illinois and Massachusetts. During a divorce proceeding, the client's abusive ex-husband, who made over \$100,000.00 per year, was ordered to pay her \$3,000.00 per month in maintenance (also known as alimony). Rather than pay, the abuser quit his job three days after the judgment was issued. My supervisor attempted to subpoena the abuser's bank records in Massachusetts, but due to Massachusetts state law requiring local subpoenas, the bank refused to comply. In order to obtain the bank records, I contacted a court clerk in Massachusetts, who provided me with instructions regarding the correct motions to file to obtain a subpoena in a local court. I also worked with another legal aid organization in Massachusetts who assisted us with advice and recommendations for filing the motion. This case made clear to me the enormous benefits

that an attorney can provide. Without legal assistance, it is extremely unlikely that the client would have known how to address the denial of the subpoena, had she filed one.

By far my most rewarding experience was a case that I personally handled as a licensed law student. A previous LAF client who had already received a divorce was attacked by her ex-husband and sought help obtaining a protective order. I was able to prepare and execute a direct examination of our client, prepare and present exhibits, and present opening and closing arguments in her case. After the hearing, the client was awarded a two-year protective order, as well as a modification of her child custody agreement that ensured her safety.

Each of these experiences was incredibly valuable to me, both personally and professionally. The financial assistance provided by Equal Justice America allowed me to pursue my passion and continue my commitment to public interest law, and I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity.



Ashley Carter

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