

October 17, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This past summer, I was an intern in the Housing Unit at the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia. Legal Aid is the District's oldest and largest civil legal services organization and provides free legal assistance to low-income residents in areas of family law, landlord-tenant, public benefits, and consumer law. In particular, the Housing Unit represent clients in eviction cases in the Landlord and Tenant Branch of D.C. Superior Court and in administrative hearings to preserve housing subsidies and challenge unlawful rent increases. Legal Aid housing law attorneys also assist clients living with deplorable housing conditions by representing them in affirmative suits to obtain repairs.

My experience at Legal Aid taught me crucial skills I will need as a future public interest attorney. I worked with most of the attorneys in the Housing Unit, who are passionate advocates for their clients and inspiring role models. They exposed me to several different styles of litigation and client communication. My tasks involved conducting legal research in preparation of potential and upcoming court cases, assisting with client intake at Legal Aid's "Attorney of the Day" office in the D.C. Superior Court, and accompanying the investigator to our clients' homes to document housing violations. I also participated in Legal Aid's Right to Counsel project (a project undertaken in collaboration with other legal services providers in DC) by reviewing complaints and identifying subsidized housing tenants whose landlords were suing them for eviction.

While interning at Legal Aid, I saw how often landlords took advantage of their low-income tenants. One of my clients was a disabled man who could only speak Spanish. He told me that his landlord had increased his rent, but he could not afford it. It turned out that the landlord had failed to inform the agency subsidizing my client's rent of the rent increase, even though he was supposed to. Though I solved the issue with a few phone calls, it angered me that my client could have been evicted simply because a landlord had not fulfilled his duties.

The work I did throughout the course of this internship was incredibly meaningful to me. Filing a simple motion could help someone keep their home. The judicial system is not built for people to advocate for themselves *pro se*, and having an advocate by their side makes a huge difference to Legal Aid's clients. I am deeply grateful to Equal Justice America for giving me the opportunity work with such amazing attorneys and clients. Thank you so much!

Sincerely,
Olivia Jerjian
Georgetown University