

July 31, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I'm writing to thank you for the generous Equal Justice America Fellowship you gave me this summer. The funding allowed me to have a very fulfilling internship experience in the Family and Matrimonial Law Unit of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG).

I spent eleven weeks with NYLAG this summer, under the supervision of Amira Samuel, a staff attorney. Over the course of the summer, I serviced nearly one hundred clients in varying capacities. Many of the clients I serviced were in the context of phone intake interviews, during which I would get basic demographic information from them and ask them questions about their case. At the end of these intake phone calls, I would refer the client to an attorney at NYLAG, give the client some basic legal information, or refer the client out to a different organization.

At the office, I spent a lot of time doing research for specific cases and also on general topics. I also had the opportunity to write draft direct and cross examinations, and to help write a summation for a child support trial. I also wrote several divorce stipulations. Additionally, I worked with two clients from start to finish on their uncontested divorces, and I worked with one client on obtaining U Non-immigrant Status (U Visa). My long term project for the summer was creating a case library of research on Jewish divorce proceedings and how civil courts respond to arbitration awards granted by religious courts.

Most of the clients that the Family Law Unit at NYLAG services are victims of domestic violence. I participated in the Courtroom Advocates Project several times over the course of the summer, and had the opportunity to appear in front of judges and advocate for my clients to get orders of protection.

One of my most interesting experiences of the summer began with the Courtroom Advocates Project. I met a client in Brooklyn Family Court who was from Bangladesh and had immigrated to the United States as a teenager. When she was fifteen years old, her parents forced her to marry a thirty seven year old man. My client went on to have two children with her husband. Her husband was verbally, physically, and sexually abuse of my client, and was also very controlling. He was sometimes abusive in front of their children. My client, now twenty-four, came to court to file for an order of protection against her husband and also to file for custody. She had fled with her children the week before to a friend's house. Unfortunately, when her children went to go visit her mother, her husband took their daughter and refused to return her to my client. We explained this to the judge,

and the judge granted my client a full stay-away order of protection that included the children. The judge explained to my client that the police would serve the order, and then execute it to remove my client's daughter from her husband's care and to return her daughter to her. However, I received a call a few days later that the police refused to execute the order in that way. My client, having not had her daughter for two weeks at that point, was distraught. I returned to family court with my client, this time to file a petition for a writ of habeas corpus. I appeared in front of the judge and advocated for my client under the supervision of an attorney from our office. The judge granted the writ of habeas corpus, ordering law enforcement to deliver my client's daughter to her immediately. I received an email from my client the next day that she had her daughter back, and that she was overjoyed. Working with this client, who is about my age, was an incredibly fulfilling experience. I had the opportunity to help someone who truly needed it, and to advocate in front of a judge and to write petitions.

Overall, working at NYLAG for the summer was a great experience that afforded me the opportunity to do hands on work and work directly with clients. After spending the summer with NYLAG, I am inspired to eventually pursue a career in public interest, specifically in direct client services.

Thank you again for the funding that helped make my internship possible.

Best,

Ella Cohen
Harvard Law School, Class of 2017